

**CHRISTOLOGY IN CONTEXT AND CONFLICT: THE NATURE  
AND PURPOSE OF CHRIST IN ORIGEN'S POLEMICAL  
THEOLOGY**

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I highlight the crucial importance of placing Origen's theology within the correct polemical context. It has been common scholarly practice to interpret the works of Origen within the context of the Nicene Controversy. This leads to distortion and confusion. The correct interpretation of Origen depends upon a detailed understanding of the intellectual milieu in which he wrote. Origen's Christology, indeed his entire theology, is primarily apologetic. He has a specific set of doctrinal opponents, whose attitudes and beliefs shape and dictate his own theology.

In the first chapter of this thesis, we discuss how Origen's engagement with pagan opponents led him to adopt their central doctrine of the *deus absconditus* and how Christ takes on the guise of a Middle-Platonic second God. We also see how Origen's main opponents within the Church were the Monarchians. It was in response to their extreme unitarianism that Origen was obliged to develop his famous doctrine of the three distinct divine οὐσίαι.

In chapter 2, we consider the controversial fragment preserved by Rufinus (*Apology* 2.9), in which Origen apparently describes the Father and the Son as ὁμοούσιος. By a careful examination of the original polemical context in which Origen wrote, namely the Monarchian controversy, we utterly reject the authenticity of this fragment. Consubstantiality was the distinguishing doctrine of the Monarchians; as such, Origen could never have endorsed it. Rufinus has skewed the original version to suit an entirely different polemical context, namely the Nicene controversy.

In chapter 3, we examine Origen's doctrine of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. Once again we see how polemic and apologetic are the main spur to the development of Origen's theology. It is in response to widespread pagan ridicule that Origen ignores the Saviour's human nature and presents Christ as wholly divine. Moreover, Origen's explanation of the mechanics of the Incarnation – exactly how it was possible for God to become man – reveals a similar awareness of traditional philosophical objections.



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I have decided to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my Grandmother, who always encouraged and supported me. We often spoke of the day when I should finish the thesis: I am sorry that she is not here to witness it.

## ORIGEN'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY IN CONTEXT

### INTRODUCTION

(i)

As head of the Catechetical school of Alexandria, influential teacher of impressionable young converts, and later as a preacher and guardian of a large urban flock, Origen was well aware of the dangers of doctrinal deviance. Although it would be another fifty years or so before the meeting of the first great Councils and the definitive establishment of doctrinal orthodoxy, Origen recognized the existence of a set of beliefs which every Christian was bound to accept. Those who did not were condemned as heretics.<sup>1</sup> Origen's work at the Catechetical school<sup>2</sup> centred upon the rigorous schooling of potential converts in the *regula fidei*.<sup>3</sup> He had to ensure that his pupils were taught the proper kind of Christianity; this was especially important in a city like Alexandria, where many variant forms of the faith were vying for attention. The thirst for doctrinal orthodoxy was something of a *leit-motif* of Origen's whole career. Eusebius' panegyric in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* depends to a very large extent upon presenting his subject as a pillar of orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> He reports, for example, on Origen's presence at the council set up to try Beryl of Bostra, who was accused of Monarchianism. We are told that Origen succeeded in converting the man to the orthodox faith (*H.E.* 6.33). He enjoyed similar success in his dealings with an anonymous heretical group, active in Arabia, who denied the immediate release of the soul (*H.E.* 6.37) and with the Helkesaites, who denied the authority of the Pauline Epistles (*H.E.* 6.38).<sup>5</sup> The recently discovered *Dialogue with Heraclides* details Origen's rigorous examination of the Trinitarian heresy of a certain Maximus. As a young teacher in Alexandria, Origen often engaged in

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<sup>1</sup> The ἑτερόδοξοι, those guilty of αἵρεσις. The use of the terms 'heresy', 'heretics', 'orthodoxy' etc. in this thesis do not of course reflect the personal opinion of the author nor are they intended in any way as value judgements. I am simply reflecting the prejudices of Origen. As we argue below, at this early date there was no precise, universally accepted definition of these key terms; 'heresy' was a subjective concept, constantly re-defined by different religious groups. It was only following the Council of Nicaea that the terms 'heresy' and 'orthodoxy' came to have a definite and specific reference.

<sup>2</sup> As reported by Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.2.8, 6.15.

<sup>3</sup> See below for a discussion and attempted definition of this central phrase.

<sup>4</sup> It was of course the major thrust of Eusebius' defence of Origen to present him in this way. We must be wary therefore of a certain amount of inevitable polemical exaggeration. Le Boulluec (1985) II, pp.439-442 notes how Pamphilus also quotes many of Origen's anti-heretical diatribes in a similar attempt to vindicate the orthodoxy of his master (Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen, passim*).

<sup>5</sup> True to the dictates of the biographical genre, Eusebius reports a childhood incident which foreshadows the major characteristic of the adult subject. After the death of his father, Origen was adopted by a wealthy benefactress. In her house, he met a number of heretics, but refused to associate with

public debates with various heretics, notably the Gnostics.<sup>6</sup> And as a presbyter in Caesarea, the mature Origen made full use of his clerical powers to excommunicate anyone he deemed a heretic.<sup>7</sup> Bardy sums up Origen's activities: "c'est fréquemment qu'Origène avait affaire aux hérétiques."<sup>8</sup>

Of course, at this early stage in the history of the Church, many fundamental questions had yet to receive definitive answers. On such subjects, Origen readily admits his own ignorance and allows ample scope for debate amongst his pupils and readers. Discussions on such notoriously controversial topics as the origin of the soul, the eternity of the world and the Resurrection of the Body frequently ended in ἀπορία.<sup>9</sup> The dialectical nature of the *de Principiis* is an obvious and well-noted feature of the work and may well indicate its origins in the noisy classrooms of the Catechetical school.<sup>10</sup> Origen is certainly not a dogmatic theologian, but one working very much within the tradition of Platonic dialectic.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, Origen does believe that there exists a simple creed, a set of beliefs which are not open to discussion, only to elaboration and explanation.<sup>12</sup> Origen begins the *de Principiis* with a list of these beliefs, which he calls the 'Apostolic Doctrine' or 'Teaching of the Church'. He claims that these fundamentals were first propagated by the Apostles themselves: they are the 'necessary' Christian

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them: φυλάττων ἐξ ἑπὶ παιδὸς κανόνα ἐκκλησίας βδελυττόμενός τε, ὡς αὐτῷ ῥήματι φησὶν που αὐτός, τὰς τῶν αἵρέσεων διδασκαλίας (HE 6.2.14).

<sup>6</sup> Jerome provides evidence of Origen's debate with the Gnostic, Candidus (*Apologia contra Rufinum* 2.19, discussed by Le Boulluec (1985) II, p.440).

<sup>7</sup> Hein (1975), pp. 316-22; 328-33.

<sup>8</sup> Bardy (1923), p.19. Le Boulluec (1985) II, pp.439-442 discusses Origen's rôle as inquisitor in some detail.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *de Principiis*, preface 4 (on the Holy Ghost); preface 5 (on the origin of the soul); preface 7 (on what existed before temporal creation); 1.4.1 (on the end of the world); 1.4.4 (on the after-life); 2.2.2 (on the perpetuity of bodily existence); 3.4.5 (on whether men have two souls); 3.6.9 (on the Resurrection of the Body); 4.4.8 (on the perpetuity of bodily existence).

<sup>10</sup> Bardy (1923), p.14 suggests that the *de Principiis* was a résumé of the lessons held at Origen's school.

<sup>11</sup> See Bardy (1923), pp.11-12, Williams (1927), p.218, Bammel (1989), p.83, Scott (1991), pp.122-3 and O'Cleirigh (1992), p.21. This important characteristic of Origen's style was noted by Pamphilus and used as an excuse for some of Origen's more daring suggestions (Pamphilus, *Preface* to the *Apology* 16-23; passage cited by Bardy (1923), p. 22).

<sup>12</sup> Outler (1939), pp. 212-3 tells us that these 'short summaries of belief' began to appear in the second century. He refers to similar examples in Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus. Outler devotes a whole paper to the topic, but seems to prefer lengthy quotations to discussion. Bennett (1997), pp.195-6 is more useful. He provides an interesting set of references to τὸ κήρυγμά τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικόν, 'by which Origen meant . . . what was publicly proclaimed in the churches of his day and (as far as he knew) had been proclaimed since Apostolic times. Although it did not have a fixed creed, this proclamation could be articulated in the form of articles (δόγματα). See also Le Boulluec (1985) II, p.441.

doctrines, which even the dullest intellect could grasp (*de Principiis*, preface 3-10).<sup>13</sup> We find similar credal lists at *Commentary on St John* 32.16 (9) and in a fragment of the *Commentary on Titus* preserved by Pamphilus (PG 17 553B-556D).<sup>14</sup> In the *Commentary on St John*, Origen lists the basic articles of faith. He who believes every point, without hesitation, is the one whom St Paul describes as having *complete faith* (1 Corinthians 13.2). As in the *de Principiis*, the articles in this list are seen as the 'necessities' of true faith. What is particularly interesting about this passage is Origen's insistence that faith, the right kind of faith, is the direct route to salvation: heretics will be damned.<sup>15</sup> In the *Commentary on Titus*, Origen makes a direct appeal to the Church (*Ecclesia*) as the arbiter of orthodoxy. Those who believe the wrong doctrines must be excluded from the Church: *qui quomodo non ab Ecclesia longe ponendi sunt, cum philarchiae morbo languentes dogmata statuerint quibus ad suum nomen discipulos declinarent?*<sup>16</sup>

References to 'the Church' as the final arbiter of Christian doctrine are common in Origen,<sup>17</sup> but we must be very careful how this is interpreted. Origen certainly did not espouse a literal interpretation of the Apostolic succession. That is to say, he did not believe that bishops, simply *qua* bishops, were the ultimate guardians of doctrinal orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> His own harsh treatment at the hands of Demetrius<sup>19</sup> was

<sup>13</sup> There is some debate amongst scholars concerning the correct interpretation of the *regula fidei* in Origen. Outler (1939), pp.220-221 and Kelly (1956), pp.4-5 see the rule as setting the safe perimeter for theological investigation and as providing the foundation and starting point for Origen's entire oeuvre. Lyman (1994), p.40 similarly argues that the *de Principiis* is simply an elaboration of the Apostolic doctrine described in the Preface. Bigg, Trigg, Bardy and Lebreton take the opposite view and argue that while the rule might well be useful for the spiritually and intellectually naïve, the advanced Christian will despise its simplicity. Bigg (1913), p.180 therefore distinguishes the rule of faith, the necessary preliminary to Christian belief, comprehensible to even the dullest minds, from the higher truths, available only to the spiritual élite. Trigg (1981), p.11 emphasizes this idea of a secret tradition, which the Apostles did not divulge to the masses. Bardy (1923), pp.9-11 agrees that the simple faithful must content themselves with the Apostolic Doctrine, while the learned indulge in more esoteric speculation. Lebreton (1923 and 1924) has devoted two papers to the common Patristic distinction between popular faith and religious philosophy, a distinction epitomized by Origen.

<sup>14</sup> Outler (1939), pp. 215-7 also refers to *Contra Celsum* 1.7 and *Commentary Series on St Matthew* 33.

<sup>15</sup> This idea of justification by faith is fully developed at *Commentary on Romans*, Book 4. For a discussion of this interesting topic, see Scheck (2000). It should be carefully noted however that Origen insisted upon the intimate connexion between faith and works: the one is the necessary and inevitable corollary of the other. Origen is naturally worried that preaching the self-sufficiency of faith might lead to antinomianism, so Scheck (2000).

<sup>16</sup> See Hein (1975), pp. 305-336 and Trigg (1981), p.7 for a full discussion of Origen's doctrine of excommunication.

<sup>17</sup> *Homilies on Genesis* 2.3.4, *Selecta in Genesis* (PG 12, 100B), *Homilies on Exodus* 9.2-3, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 13.17, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 5.16, *Commentary on St John* 13.16, *Commentary Series on St Matthew* 61, *de Principiis* 3.5.1, *Dialogue with Heraclides* 1.17-18.

<sup>18</sup> Le Boulluec (1985) II, p.441 notes that although Origen accepted the existence of the 'Rule of Faith', inherited directly from the Apostles, he did not come to a corresponding acceptance of the authority of bishops: 'il préfère conserver le primat dans l'Eglise aux témoins du Christ que sont les 'spirituels', les 'parfaits'.'

<sup>19</sup> As described by Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.9.5. Hein (1975), pp. 305-6 discusses this formative episode.

enough to turn him against what one might call the established Church. Nor did he invest the Pope with any particular authority as the successor of St. Peter.<sup>20</sup> Trigg and Bigg are right to detect a certain amount of anti-clericalism in Origen.<sup>21</sup> Origen repeatedly distinguished the Spiritual Church from the Visible Church and often condemned and rejected the actions and opinions of the latter.<sup>22</sup>

In the absence of any centralized authority in Rome, in the period before Creeds and Councils, and – crucially – without the recognition of any kind of ecclesiastical hierarchy, Origen could allow himself to be the final arbiter of orthodoxy and heresy.<sup>23</sup> As one presenting himself as a priest of the only true Church, the invisible and spiritual Church, it is little wonder that Origen professed an arrogant assurance on all the *minutiae* of doctrinal orthodoxy. Perhaps the safest conclusion to this brief introduction is that Origen identified himself and his fellow intellectuals as ‘the Church’ and that ‘heresy’ was defined negatively, as whatever they did not believe.

(ii)

Many of Origen’s theological works are direct and deliberate polemics against what he sees as heresy. The mistakes of others are the foundation and the springboard for his whole theological system. In my opinion, Origen is the Apologist *par excellence*. Not only does he defend the faith from intellectual pagan ridicule by creating for Christianity a solid philosophical base, he is also constantly aware of the dangers of the enemy within. No one in the third century could afford to be complacent. Not for another three hundred years could the Church rest on its laurels and indulge in truly disinterested enquiry. At this early stage it was under constant attack from both within and without and was obliged to be constantly on guard. I cannot accept the conclusions of Leo Scheffczyk and Bethune-Baker that

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<sup>20</sup> Although, even at this early date, the Pope liked to present himself as the guardian of the teachings of the Church and as the ultimate arbiter of doctrinal orthodoxy, (so Bigg (1913), p.258). Langerbeck (1957), p.68 discusses the influence of Rome on the Christian community of Alexandria in the third century. It was only at the accession of the hard-line Bishop Demetrius (AD 189) that ‘agreement to the faith of the *Roman* community (became) the standard of Christian orthodoxy and therefore of membership of the Church’ (my emphasis). In the preceding decades, Egyptian Christians had formed a much looser group. Trigg (1981), p.7 makes a very similar point.

<sup>21</sup> Trigg (1981), pp.5-7 and Bigg (1913), pp.258, 260, 267-9. The reader is also referred to Jerome’s version of Origen’s *Letter to his Friends at Alexandria*, in which Origen complains bitterly about the Alexandrian Church hierarchy (Jerome, *Apologia contra Rufinum* 2.18). Although we must allow for a certain amount of polemical exaggeration, it seems reasonable to believe that Origen bore some very deep grudges against Demetrius and his fellows.

<sup>22</sup> See Hein (1975), pp.317-8 on the distinction between excommunication from the real, Spiritual Church and excommunication from merely the Visible Church: the latter is quite likely to be invalid.

<sup>23</sup> Of course, this does not mean that Origen considered himself to be working within a doctrinal vacuum. As we have seen, he accepted the great importance of tradition, of an unbroken thread of orthodoxy reaching back to the Apostles. On this, see Hanson (1954).

Origen ushered in a glorious new age in which theology could finally become an *ars gratia artis*.<sup>24</sup> For Origen, theology was essentially and fundamentally apology. In all his works he is defending himself and his beliefs from either internal or external attack, from either the ridicule of pagan intellectuals or the ravages of Christian heresy.<sup>25</sup>

Almost everything that Origen says is said as a response and as a correction of the mistakes of others. For example, his famously extreme doctrine of the freedom of the will is developed as a direct response to Gnostic determinism. This kind of reactive or responsive theology was of course a very common phenomenon in the early Church. The history of the development of dogma in the first five hundred years of Christianity is intimately connected with the flourishing and subsequent condemnation of specific heresies. For example, the theology of Nicaea was developed almost entirely in response to the doctrines of Arius and his followers. It was they who decided the agenda and drew up the battle-lines. Everything that was decided by the orthodox was decided in response to the Arians. We must be careful that we do not see Nicaea as the culmination and ratification of three hundred years of theological enquiry. It was rather an *ad hoc*, sometimes unwelcome, response to contemporary pressures. Even the most famous articles of the Nicene Creed were startling innovations. The fact that they were formulated at all is simply an accident of history, the desperate reaction to an unforeseen and terrible heresy. Arius and his followers had forced the hand of their opponents.

To put the matter simply, without the Arian heresy, there would be no doctrine of the Trinity. Without the Nestorian heresy, there would be no Christology. Without the Pelagian heresy, there would be no adequate doctrine of grace. Without the Monothelite heresy, there would be no understanding of Christ's two wills. It can thus be argued that the major credal statements of the Church, the definitive orthodox doctrines issued by the great Ecumenical Councils, were to a very large extent accidental, unplanned responses to unforeseen dangerous circumstances. For example, the sudden appearance of Arianism forced its opponents to re-examine the relationship of the Father and the Son. Before this, there was no need, or at least no urgency, to clarify these points. The Church could continue in its rather vague notion of the Trinity and be satisfied.

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<sup>24</sup> Scheffczyk (1970), p.82 and Bethune-Baker (1933), p.145.

<sup>25</sup> In the third chapter of this study, we shall see how Origen's doctrine of the Incarnation and his description of the earthly life of Jesus Christ were developed in direct response to pagan ridicule. Origen's task as apologist was to present a Christ who was acceptable to pagan philosophers. It is this intention that directs and dictates the whole of Origen's Christology.



In a recent lecture, Richard Holloway made the daring move of applying Kuhn's notion of the 'paradigm shift' to the process of the development of Christian doctrine.<sup>26</sup> He argues that there are no definitively and objectively correct answers to the major theological questions and that paradigms need to be constantly revised in response to new worries, new fears and new religious requirements. Theology is very sensitive to particular social and historical *milieux*. This argument is similar in many ways to the argument of Cardinal Newman's great work, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*.<sup>27</sup> For both Holloway and Newman, the main point is the way in which the theologians of the Early Church were constantly defending themselves, responding to the erroneous opinions of others and formulating their own doctrines *precisely as a response*. We must therefore recognize the great importance of heresies as providing the necessary impetus for the major doctrinal developments of the Early Church.<sup>28</sup>

Bethune-Baker<sup>29</sup> quotes a very interesting passage from Origen's *Homilies on Numbers* which shows that Origen was fully aware of the advantages of engaging with heretics in this way: *nam si doctrina ecclesiastica simplex esset et nullis intrinsecus haeticorum dogmatum assentionibus cingeretur, non poterat tam clara et tam examinata videri fides nostra. sed idcirco doctrinam catholicam contradicentium obsidet oppugnatio, ut fides nostra non otio torpescat, sed exercitiis elimetur* (in *Num. Hom. 9*). Athanasius shows how Origen's methodology came to rely upon precisely this kind of polemical encounter (*de Decretis 27.2*).

(iii)

Origen's doctrine of the Trinity is the conscious and deliberate response to two particular heresies. The first heresy is the Gnostic doctrine that the Son is a corporeal emanation (προβολή) from the Father. The second heresy is Monarchianism, an extreme unitarianism, according to which Father, Son and Holy Ghost are simply convenient labels used to describe the different actions or operations performed by the one God.<sup>30</sup> The refutation of Gnosticism and Monarchianism became Origen's life's work. He wrote against them as a young man in Alexandria and as an old man in Caesarea. In order to understand Origen's theology, it is vitally important to understand the theology of his opponents and in

<sup>26</sup> Holloway (2000 I), pp. 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Briefly discussed by Bethune-Baker (1933), p.36.

<sup>28</sup> See Le Boulluec (1985) II, p.443, for a brief discussion of 'la nécessité et la utilité des hérésies.' Bethune-Baker (1933), pp.2-4 also discusses the topic. He argues that "heresies have rendered no small service to theological science. The defence of doctrines impugned and the discussion of the points at issue led to a deeper and closer understanding of the subject."

<sup>29</sup> Bethune-Baker (1933), p.2.

this way to understand his polemical objectives, his purpose in writing what he wrote. Mis-readings and mis-representations of Origen are very often the direct result of a failure to take full account of his apologetic intentions, specifically of a failure to identify the heretical opponents in response to whom Origen developed his theology. For example, it is very tempting to view Origen through the lens of a post-Nicene orthodoxy. Various scholars seem to assume that Origen was concerned to prove the equality, even the consubstantiality, of the Father and the Son and that his Trinitarian theology was directed towards this specific end.<sup>31</sup> But this was not at all Origen's concern. Those exploring Origen's Trinitarian theology must always remember that his main enemies were the Monarchians. Monarchianism was an entirely different theology from Arianism, even its opposite. It required therefore an entirely different response. The Arians argued that the Son was created from nothing by the will of the Father and that he was not God, but a mere creature. In response to this, the orthodox were forced to stress the similarity, or rather the identity, of the Father and the Son. The Monarchians argued that the Son was exactly the same as the Father and that the 'Trinity' was a mere onomastic convenience. In response to this, Origen was forced to stress the difference between the Father and the Son.

May this brief, simplified example illustrate the immense importance of identifying and understanding a theologian's doctrinal opponents as the crucial first stage in understanding the theologian himself. As Athanasius' Trinitarian theology makes sense only in the context of Arianism and only as a response to Arianism, so Origen's Trinitarian theology makes sense only in the context of Gnosticism and Monarchianism and only as a response to Gnosticism and Monarchianism.<sup>32</sup> In the course of this study, it will therefore become necessary to examine thoroughly the theology of Origen's heretical contemporaries. May the reader understand that this is not a diversion, a mere scholarly aside, but the crucial background to any full study of Origen. With all the above in mind, let us now turn to a detailed examination of Origen's Trinitarian doctrine, in its proper historical context.

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<sup>30</sup> See section 4.1 for a full discussion of Monarchianism.

<sup>31</sup> The great debate – "Did Origen apply the term *ὁμοούσιος* to the Son?" – hinges on this very point. We discuss the debate in detail in chapter two.

<sup>32</sup> In this study we deal with the Gnostics only cursorily. Although it cannot be denied that the refutation of Gnostic materialism is a very important factor in the development of Origen's Trinitarian doctrine, this is a Patristic common-place. Almost all the ante-Nicene Fathers, Greek and Roman, voice the same objections and the same solutions. Debate with Monarchianism is much more unusual and therefore, I would argue, much more interesting.

## THE APOLOGIST DOCTRINE OF GOD AND THE LOGOS

### (1.1)

A fundamental doctrine of Origen's Trinitarian system, and one familiar to even his most casual readers,<sup>33</sup> is the eternal generation of the Son.<sup>34</sup> In developing this famous doctrine, Origen has made the conscious and deliberate decision to reject the Apologist doctrine of the two-stage Logos, a theological paradigm which had dominated theology for the past hundred years.<sup>35</sup> The development of the doctrine of eternal generation was a decisive turning point in the history of dogma, a crucially important paradigm shift, which paved the way for the Trinitarian triumphs of the following century.<sup>36</sup> But in order to appreciate the great novelty of Origen's doctrine and to understand the theological motivation behind it, it is first necessary to understand the Apologist doctrine of the two-stage Logos.

### (1.2)

While the writers of the Apostolic Age had been content to write for the Church as a closed and private élite, the Apologists of the second century were deeply concerned with the world outside.<sup>37</sup> There is much debate in contemporary scholarship concerning the purpose and function of these Apologies, in particular their intended audience. It has often been assumed that the Apologists were missionaries and that their sole aim and purpose was conversion,<sup>38</sup> but this view has recently been challenged. Many scholars now argue that the Apologists wrote for an internal readership, to re-assure the doubtful and to bolster the confidence of recent converts.<sup>39</sup> It seems most likely to me that the famous Apologies of the second century were, in the words of Simon Price,<sup>40</sup> both intrinsic and extrinsic, i.e. aimed at both Christians and non-Christians. Although there is little evidence of the evangelistic success of the Apologists, their works would surely have been read by potential converts, seeking intellectual

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<sup>33</sup> As I have gathered from various conversations with non-experts.

<sup>34</sup> See section 2.1 for a full analysis of the doctrine.

<sup>35</sup> There is some debate as to whether Clement accepted the doctrine of the two-stage Logos. This is not the place to enter such a complicated discussion. The interested reader is referred to Edwards (2000), for an exhaustive analysis.

<sup>36</sup> Bethune-Baker (1933), p.148 calls the theory "Origen's chief permanent contribution to the doctrine of the person of Christ."

<sup>37</sup> The Apologists with whom I shall be dealing are Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus, Athenagoras and Tertullian. Hippolytus, while not technically an Apologist, wrote at the same time as the Apologists and shares many of the Apologist doctrines, including that of the two-stage Logos. He will also feature in this section. For a useful discussion of the Apologist agenda, see Grant (1988) and Edwards, Price and Goodman (1999).

<sup>38</sup> So, Scheffczyk (1969), pp.54-64 and Grant (1988), p.11 and *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> So, Edwards (1995), pp.279-80, Edwards, Price and Goodman (1999), pp.8-10 and Young (1999), *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Price (1999).

justification for such a bold move.<sup>41</sup> By the second century, Christianity was attracting large numbers from the educated élite; it should be remembered that many of the Apologists themselves were brought up as pagans and educated in the traditional pagan way.<sup>42</sup> Converts of this calibre thirsted for intellectual explanations and for a faith fully attuned to the established philosophical creed. Christians were no longer imprisoned in a cultural vacuum, but took careful note of the beliefs and doctrines of the outside world. In many cases, these doctrines were happily and readily absorbed. It is this syncretism that is the hall mark of Apologetic literature, distinguishing it sharply from its precursors. The Apologists of the second century recognized the advantages of adopting and - only to a certain extent - adapting the beliefs of their pagan contemporaries. Potential or recent converts needed to be convinced that the tenets of Christianity were similar in many ways to the fundamental *credos* of pagan religious philosophy. An evangelism that preached a radically new system, a thorough overthrow of all that was held most dear, would be doomed to failure. So it came about that the God of the Old and New Testament was gradually transformed into the God of the philosophers. As a necessary parallel to this, Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, was forced to become the Logos, an abstract metaphysical entity.<sup>43</sup> In developing their new theology, the second century Apologists turned for inspiration to the doctrines of Middle-Platonism.<sup>44</sup> This is the philosophy with which they would have been most familiar. At this date handbooks and commentaries dominated the school curriculum, at the expense of the original texts. Schoolboys would have been much more familiar with a work like Albinus' *Handbook of Platonism* than with the original Dialogues.<sup>45</sup> So it was that the God of the Apologists came to have a very great deal in common with the God of Albinus, Numenius and Apuleius. He becomes less and less the loving Father of the Bible and more and more a Middle-Platonic First Principle. Tatian, in his *Oratio ad Graecos*, is careful to describe God in a way that would directly appeal to the philosophical penchants of his educated readers: he is eternal, impassible, invisible and entirely self-sufficient (*Oratio* 4). We find a similar list of divine attributes in Athenagoras' *Embassy*: God is one, unbegotten,

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<sup>41</sup> Nock (1933), p.192.

<sup>42</sup> Nock (1933), p.250.

<sup>43</sup> Of course Christ had already been identified as the Logos by the writer of the Fourth Gospel (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος), but Logos theology was not fully developed until the time of the Apologists. John's opening remarks simply provided useful Scriptural legitimacy for what was an essentially philosophical claim.

<sup>44</sup> For the purposes of this study, I take Numenius, Apuleius and Albinus as the representatives of Middle-Platonic philosophy. For much of the information and argument of this section, I am indebted to John Dillon's *The Middle Platonists* (1977).

<sup>45</sup> On this point, see Dillon (1993), p.xiv. In this study, we always use the name Albinus for the author of the *Handbook of Platonism*. The alternative name, Alcinoos, appears on the MSS.

eternal, invisible, impassible and apprehensible to the mind alone (*Embassy* 10). In these theologies there is, quite deliberately I believe, no reference to anything that is specifically Christian.

Most relevant to the present enquiry however is the Apologist adoption of the central Middle-Platonic belief in the transcendence of the First God. Numenius, Albinus and Apuleius all believed in a supreme God who was unknowable and un-nameable and who was concerned with nothing other than himself. In a famous and much discussed passage, Albinus argues that God is above and beyond every possible category of being, every possible attribute and every possible description: he is neither good nor bad, qualified nor unqualified, neither a part nor a whole, neither the same as anything nor different from anything, neither moving nor moved (Albinus, *Handbook* 10.4). If he can be described at all, it is by the *via negativa* or by the *via analogiae* (*ibid* 10.5-6). Albinus goes on to argue that such a lofty being would necessarily be concerned with nothing other than himself: “since the primary intellect is the finest of things, it follows that the object of its intelligizing must also be supremely fine. But there is nothing finer than this intellect. Therefore it must be everlastingly engaged in thinking of itself and its own thoughts” (*ibid.* 10.3, trans. Dillon).<sup>46</sup>

Numenius similarly argues that God is surrounded by an indescribable and unspeakable silence (τις ἀφατος καὶ ἀδιήγητος ἀτεχνῶς ἑρημία θεσπέσιος)<sup>47</sup> and that he is concerned with nothing other than himself: (ὁ θεὸς ὁ μὲν πρῶτος ἐν ἑαυτοῦ ὧν ἐστὶν ἀπλοῦς, διὰ τὸ ἑαυτῷ συγγιγνόμενος διόλου μὴ ποτε εἶναι διαιρετός).<sup>48</sup> Apuleius likewise insists on the doctrine of divine ineffability: God is *indictum* and *innominabilem*; his nature is hard to understand (*de Platone* 190; c.f. *de Mundo* 342).

The Apologists similarly envisaged God the Father as the *deus absconditus*, a hidden and incomprehensible being, who remained aloof and detached from the created world.<sup>49</sup> Justin develops this idea by arguing that God can never be named. He argues that the traditional divine titles – God, Creator, Lord, Master – describe merely the functions of the First Principle, his relations *vis-à-vis* creation, and not his essence, which can never be known and never described (*Second Apology*, 6; *To the Greeks*, 21). This is surely a Christian version of Philo’s famous argument that we can only ever

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<sup>46</sup> The source of this doctrine is Aristotle’s self-thinking Mind, as described in *Metaphysics* Λ.

<sup>47</sup> Numenius, fragment 2, des Places.

<sup>48</sup> Numenius, fragment 11, des Places.

<sup>49</sup> Grant (1988), pp.60-61 refers to Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56.1 and 127.2: the Father never leaves his lofty abode to deal with men, but always remains in the ‘highest heaven.’ Grant likens this doctrine to Numenius’ insistence on divine transcendence.

know the δυνάμεις of God and not his οὐσία.<sup>50</sup> It is Theophilus however who voices the most thorough negative theology. In chapter 1.3 of his lengthy appeal *ad Autolycum*, Theophilus expresses the transcendence of God through a long list of negative attributes: God is ineffable, indescribable, unfathomable, inconceivable, incomprehensible, unrivalled, unutterable and inimitable. It is only by an appreciation of the works and powers of God, as expressed in creation, that we might glimpse something of his ineffable nature. As rays of light point to the sun, so the wonders of nature point to God (*ad Autolycum*, 1.5-6).<sup>51</sup>

Having accepted that God is a radically transcendent being who can never be known and never be described, the Middle-Platonists and the Apologists were obliged to develop a doctrine of delegation.<sup>52</sup> Delegation was the necessary and inevitable corollary of the doctrine of divine transcendence.<sup>53</sup> The tasks of creation and providence must be delegated to an inferior being, allowing the First God to remain in splendid isolation, detached and aloof. Thus it was suggested that there existed an inferior, or Second God, who both created the world and was responsible for all subsequent providential control. This model is most clearly presented by Numenius in his work *On the Good*. Numenius explicitly states that the First God remained 'idle' (ἀργός) during creation (frag. 12). In fragment 13, Numenius compares the relationship of the Creator (Demiurge) and the First God to that of a farmer and a sower: it is the latter that does the actual physical labour of planting the seeds. Similarly, in fragment 15, Numenius contrasts the stability, in-action and eternal στάσις of the First God with the inherent movement and activity (κίνησις) of the Second God. Finally, in fragment 16, Numenius re-iterates the claim that it is the Demiurge who is the γενέσεως ἀρχή.<sup>54</sup> Albinus also delegates the work of creation to a Second God. In chapter 10.3 of the *Handbook*, Albinus describes a model of creation via intermediaries: the First God 'bestows order' on the Heavenly Intellect, who in turn 'bestows order' on world. Furthermore, basing himself on the arguments of the *Timaeus*, Albinus posits the existence of various 'created gods' or 'daemons', who are responsible for the administration of the sub-lunar world (*Handbook* 15). Apuleius too develops a detailed doctrine of delegation to explain the day to day running of the cosmos. In order to preserve the *dignitas* and *maiestas* of God, we must assume that he

<sup>50</sup> On this, see Sandmell (1979), pp.92-93 and Witt (1933), p.330 (citing Philo, Fragment 60). For Origen's acceptance of this credo, see sections 10.2 and 12.1.

<sup>51</sup> See Tatian, *Oratio*, 4 and Athenagoras, *Embassy*, 10 for similar descriptions of divine transcendence.

<sup>52</sup> For a brief but useful discussion of the doctrine of delegation, see Sharples (1995), pp.9-11.

<sup>53</sup> The alternative was the Epicurean theory that there is no providence and that men are left entirely to their own devices.

works through a complex of intermediaries. In a famous and much quoted passage, Apuleius compares God to an Eastern potentate who relies on deputies and satraps to rule his vast empire (*de Mundo* 343-352).<sup>55</sup>

The Christian Apologists agreed with their pagan *confrères* that the First God, God the Father, must be protected from any unworthy activity. If God is indeed the kind of abstract, distant being described by the Apologists, it becomes impossible to believe that he created and redeemed the world and that he directs and dictates our lives with meticulous providential control. Such busy activity would ill become such a superior being. Yet, as Christians, the Apologists could not reject the authority of the Bible, which repeatedly and explicitly states that God cares for his creation as a father for his children: not even a sparrow can die without his knowledge. The Apologists were thus faced with the problem of reconciling the philosophical insistence on divine transcendence with the Biblical insistence on divine providence. The solution to this dilemma lay in the doctrine of delegation and mediation. The crucial tasks of creation, providence and redemption are delegated to the Son, or as he is usually known in this period, the Logos. The God of the Apologists never deigned to leave his lofty abode and involve himself directly with the doings of men.

In the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin attempts to convince his interlocutor that the manifestations of God described in the Old Testament are all manifestations of the Son. It was not God the Father who 'shut Noah up in the ark' (Gen. 7.16), who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19) and who 'spoke to Moses' (Exodus 6.2ff), but the Son (*Dialogue* 128.2). Theophilus uses the same argument. How, he asks, could God possibly have 'walked in the garden' (Gen. 3.8)? It must have been the Son who assumed the guise of the Father and thus conversed with Adam. In a rare pun, Theophilus argues that the 'voice' which Adam heard must have been the Logos (*ad Autolycum* 2.22).

If the transcendence of God would not allow him a direct and active rôle in the day-to-day running of the cosmos, neither could it allow him a direct and active rôle in its original creation. It is in their cosmogonical theories that the Apologists stress most fully the need for mediation. Such a lowly, workmanlike task as creation would obviously compromise the dignity of the supreme God. For the Apologists, the Son (the Logos) takes on the rôle of Demiurge. It is he who creates the world. The

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<sup>54</sup> As Dillon (1992), p.13 points out, the First God is creator only insofar as he is father of the creator.

<sup>55</sup> The origin of this metaphor was of course pseudo-Aristotle's *de Mundo*. Written in the first century B.C., this text became extremely popular with the Middle-Platonists.

proem of the Gospel of John was seized upon as the perfect Scriptural base for the claim, since the Evangelist clearly states that it is the Logos *through whom all things were made*.<sup>56</sup>

So, for the Apologists, the Logos exists as the tool or intermediary of the Father, the one to whom he delegates the lowly tasks of creation and providence. But having formulated this basic belief, a number of difficult questions inevitably arose. Did the Logos exist *only* for the purposes of creation and providence? Did he come into existence only on the 'eve of creation',<sup>57</sup> only at such a time as his existence was needed and required?<sup>58</sup> Was he therefore a creature, like all other creatures, created at a particular time and for a particular purpose? Must one accept that, before this time, God the Father was without the Logos, ἄλογος (irrational)? It was in the attempt to solve these questions that the Apologists developed their doctrine of the two-stage Logos.<sup>59</sup> At the first stage of its existence, the Logos resides within the Father as his immanent reason, or rational faculty. At the second stage, he processes from the Father in order to create the world.

(1.3)

The Apologists argue that at the first stage of its existence the Logos is to be identified with the Father's immanent reason or rational faculty. There was no time therefore when the Father was ἄλογος. In his *Embassy on Behalf of Christians*, Athenagoras insists that the Logos did not come to be (οὐχ ὡς γενόμενον) but was with God from the beginning. Being eternally rational (αἰδίως λογικὸς ὢν), God was in eternal possession of his rationality (λόγος) (*Embassy* 1.10). Theophilus agrees that the Logos *always exists, residing within the heart of God. For before anything came into being, (God) had (the Logos) as his counsellor, being his own mind and thought (ad Autolycum* 2.22, trans. Dods). Theophilus goes on to provide an exegesis of the first verse of the Fourth Gospel. Highlighting John's claim that the *Word was with God*, Theophilus argues that God was never alone, because his word was eternally 'with him'. Tertullian and Hippolytus both adopt the paradigm of the two-stage Logos. Tertullian's arguments in the *Adversus Praxean* are strikingly similar to those of Theophilus. Describing the 'period' before creation, Tertullian insists that the Logos existed eternally as God's rational faculty (*ratio*), that by which he planned and arranged the creation of the world: *ne*

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<sup>56</sup> See section 1.3 for a discussion of the Logos' rôle in creation.

<sup>57</sup> Scheffczyk's phrase (Scheffczyk (1970), p.59).

<sup>58</sup> This question did not arise for the pagan Middle-Platonists, for whom (despite the evidence of the *Timaeus*), the eternity of the world was axiomatic. An eternal creation obviously requires an eternal creator.

<sup>59</sup> So Casey (1924), p.48.



*tunc quidem solus: habebat enim secum quam habebat in semetipso rationem suam. rationalis enim deus. . . nam etsi Deus nondum Sermonem suam miserat*<sup>60</sup> *proinde eum cum ipsa et in ipsa ratione intra semetipsum habebat, tacite cogitando et disponendo secum quae per Sermonem mox erat dicturus* (*Adversus Praxean* 5). Hippolytus is similarly insistent that God is in eternal possession of all his divine attributes and that it therefore makes no sense to say that the Logos came into existence at a particular time: αὐτὸς δὲ μόνος ὦν πολὺς ἦν. οὔτε γὰρ ἄλογος οὔτε ἄσοφος οὔτε ἀδύνατος οὔτε ἀβούλευτος ἦν. πάντα δὲ ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ, αὐτὸς δὲ ἦν τὸ πᾶν (*contra Noetum* 10.2). This idea is repeated at the end of the *Refutatio*, where Hippolytus summarizes his own views: οὗτος οὖν ὁ μόνος καὶ κατὰ πάντων θεὸς λόγον πρῶτον ἐννοηθεὶς ἀπογεννᾷ· οὐ λόγον ὡς φωνήν, ἀλλ' ἐνδιάθετον τοῦ παντός λογισμὸν (*Refutatio* 10.33.1).<sup>61</sup>

There is some disagreement amongst Patristic scholars concerning the precise status of the Logos at this first stage. Crehan, the translator of Athenagoras' *Embassy*, insists that the Logos exists eternally as an individual divine person. Having reviewed the Apologist's doctrine of the immanent Logos, Crehan warns incautious readers that "this does not mean that he thought of the Word (at this stage) as a mere faculty of the Father's being."<sup>62</sup> d'Alès, discussing the Apologist doctrine in general, agrees with Crehan: "les textes qui nous montrent le Verbe existant éternellement en Dieu ne permettent guère de le concevoir comme un simple attribut divin. C'est donc une personne."<sup>63</sup> Against this, Bardy argues *à propos* Athenagoras that "lorsqu'il écrit que Dieu est éternellement raisonnable, ne semble-t-il pas faire de la raison, du Verbe, un attribut et non une personne distincte?"<sup>64</sup> Puech argues similarly that "antérieurement à la création, le Verbe serait plutôt une faculté qu'une personne."<sup>65</sup> Prestige likewise concludes that the doctrine of the first-stage Logos "could easily be made to support the contention that the Logos was impersonal – a mere attribute of God – until the point in historic time at which he proceeded forth from the Father in the act of creation. Any such previous impersonality could derogate

<sup>60</sup> This is a reference to the second-stage Logos, which we discuss below.

<sup>61</sup> I do not accept Edwards' interpretation of this passage: "for all we are told, the phase when (the Logos) is merely a conception in the mind may be instantaneous" (Edwards (2000), p. 163). There are two main problems with this reading. First, why has Edwards ignored the evidence of *Contra Noetum* 10.2, in which Hippolytus clearly states that the Logos was an eternal attribute of God, that there was no time when he was ἄλογος etc? Second, if Hippolytus' God was possessed of his Logos only for an instant, was he irrational prior to that? This would not make sense.

<sup>62</sup> Crehan (1956), p.22.

<sup>63</sup> d'Alès (1905), p.88.

<sup>64</sup> Bardy (1943), p.56. See also *ibid.*, p. 41: "lorsqu'il écrit que Dieu ayant en ses entrailles son Verbe intérieur . . . ne semble-t-il pas insinuer qu'avant la création, le Verbe ne possédait pas sa personnalité, n'était pas réellement distinct du Père?"

<sup>65</sup> Puech, *Les Apologues Grecs*, pp.188-189 (quoted by Bardy (1943), p.57).

from the worth and even from the reality of his eternal existence.”<sup>66</sup> Bethune-Baker agrees and argues that the first-stage Logos is “still impersonal – in indistinguishable union with God as the divine intelligence.”<sup>67</sup> Finally, Spanneut, discussing Tertullian’s doctrine of the immanent Logos, concludes that it does not have “une individualité totale.”<sup>68</sup>

This is an important point that will have far reaching ramifications for our discussion of Origen’s Trinitarian theology, in particular his development of the doctrine of eternal generation. We shall argue below that Origen’s main doctrinal opponents were the Monarchians, who denied that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost were distinct from one another and who identified the three persons of the Trinity as merely different attributes of one and the same indivisible Godhead. In refuting this heresy, Origen must show that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three distinct and individual οὐσίαι and not simply immanent mental faculties.<sup>69</sup> If the Apologist doctrine of the two-stage Logos posited a period of existence for the Logos in which it was indistinct from the Father, a mere attribute of the Father, Origen would have good reason to reject the doctrine. Having studied the evidence, it seems to me that the Apologist doctrine of the immanent Logos is almost identical to the Monarchian doctrine of the unitarian God. I agree wholeheartedly with Bardy, Puech, Prestige, Bethune-Baker and Spanneut that the immanent Logos is simply an attribute of the eternal Father, that aspect of his divinity with which he thinks and reasons and plans. If the Logos were eternally ‘une personne’, as d’Alès and Crehan suggest, what would be distinctive about the second stage of his existence? As it is, the Apologists are at great pains to distinguish these two stages, to distinguish the Logos as the Father’s immanent reason and the Logos as the creator of the world.

Having decided to create the world, the Father sends forth his Logos to be the instrument of creation. The instrumental function of the Logos is most clearly described by Tertullian: *ut primum Deus voluit ea quae cum Sophia et Ratione et Sermone disposuerat intra se, in substantias et species suas edere, ipsum primum protulit Sermonem . . . ut per ipsum fierent universa per quem erant cogitata atque disposita* (*Adversus Praxean* 6). Theophilus uses the same model: *when God wished to make all that he had determined on, he begot his Word* (*ad Autolycum* 2.22, trans. Dods). Hippolytus similarly stresses the rôle of the second-stage Logos in creation: *When the Father commands that a world should come into being, the Logos in his unity with him performed what was pleasing to God* (*Refutatio* 10.33.1,

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<sup>66</sup> Prestige (1936), pp.123-4.

<sup>67</sup> Bethune-Baker (1933), p.108.

<sup>68</sup> Spanneut (1963), p.313.

trans. Edwards). This idea is also found in the earlier *Contra Noetum*: ὅτε ἠθέλησεν, καθὼς ἠθέλησεν, ἔδειξεν τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ καιροῖς ὠρισμένοις παρ' αὐτῶ· δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐποίησεν (*Contra Noetum* 10.3). Athenagoras and Tatian hold the same view: the immanent Logos processes *ad extra* only in order to create the world.<sup>70</sup>

Having recognized the necessity of two Logoi, the Logos as the Father's immanent reason and the Logos as creator of the world, the Apologists were obliged to clarify the relationship between the two. Is the Logos which creates the world the same as the Logos which exists eternally within the Father? Are the Apologists simply describing two stages in the existence of one and the same being? It is common practice for Patristic scholars to speak of the identity of the two Logoi and thus to distinguish the Apologist doctrine from the later Arian version.<sup>71</sup> The Arians taught that there were two distinct Logoi, (i) God's eternal rationality and (ii) the instrument of creation, created *ex nihilo* at a particular time and for a particular purpose.<sup>72</sup> For the Apologists, however, the situation is much more complicated. They argue that the two Logoi are, if not exactly one and the same Logos passing through two different stages of existence, at least intimately connected with one another. The one arises out of the other and is directly dependent upon it. The eternal Logos, immanent in the Father, processes *ad extra* for the purposes of creation. But the Apologists are also keen to stress that this procession does not diminish or in any way effect the rationality of the Father: he is not thereby deprived of his Logos, rendered ἄλογος. In an attempt to explain this idea, the Apologists made use of the originally Stoic distinction between the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and the λόγος προφορικὸς, word as silent thought and word spoken aloud. As we shall see, this image implies that the two Logoi are neither identical nor entirely different and discrete.

(1.4)

Details of this doctrine outside the works of the Apologists are unfortunately scanty.<sup>73</sup> We must conclude however that this is simply an accident of history, the inevitable result of the loss of ancient texts, since the doctrine was clearly a common-place. The juxtaposition of λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and λόγος προφορικὸς occurs in a variety of different sources, without the apparent need for explanation

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<sup>69</sup> See section 5 for a full discussion of Origen's refutation of Monarchianism.

<sup>70</sup> Athenagoras, *Embassy* 1.10 and Tatian, *Oratio* 5.

<sup>71</sup> So d'Alès (1905), p.88, Stead (1964), p.20, Casey (1924), pp.45-6 and Prestige (1936), p.123. We shall argue below that it is not quite correct to identify the two Logoi. The relationship between the two is rather one of type and image.

<sup>72</sup> For an overview of the Arian doctrine of the Logos, see Stead (1964).

or elaboration. It was clearly assumed that the doctrine would be familiar to most readers. Origen, Philo and Porphyry all use the terminology, very much in passing.<sup>74</sup> Sextus Empiricus provides a few more details, when he argues that, while certain animals (crows, parrots and jays) possess and exhibit λόγος προφορικός, only humans have λόγος ἐνδιάθετος (*Mathematici* 8.287.3). Galen analyses λόγος ἐνδιάθετος, identifying it with intelligence, thought and mind and clearly distinguishing it from λόγος κατὰ φωνήν (*in Hippocr. de med. officina* iii, 18B).<sup>75</sup> Albinus similarly distinguishes the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος from the λόγος προφορικός, by pointing out that it is the latter which is heard (*Prologue to Plato* 2.2). Ptolemy, the Alexandrian polymath, is our most useful source for understanding this doctrine. His evidence becomes particularly important if we recall that he wrote in the second century AD, i.e. at the same time as the Apologists. In a rather obscure and little known work, *de iudicandi facultate*, Ptolemy attempts to explain the rational process. In chapter two, Ptolemy identifies λόγος ἐνδιάθετος as διάνοια (thought) and λόγος προφορικός as διάλεκτος (discourse). What is crucial about his discussion is the intimate connexion between these two λόγοι. They are certainly not ‘discrete phenomena’;<sup>76</sup> the one emerges from the other and is entirely dependent upon it. While of course not every thought need express itself in the spoken word,<sup>77</sup> every spoken word must originate as a thought. Thus Ptolemy calls the λόγος προφορικός an εἰκὼν (‘image’):

διάνοια μὲν ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐνδιάθετος διέξοδος τις οὖσα καὶ ἀναπόλησις καὶ διάκρισις τῶν μνημονευθέντων· διάλεκτος δὲ τὰ τῆς φωνῆς σύμβολα, δι’ ὧν προφέρεται τοῖς πλησίον τὰ διανοηθέντα· καὶ ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τις· ὁ μὲν φθόγγος αὐτοῦ τοῦ νοῦ· τῆς δ’ ἐννοίας ἡ φωνή· τῆς δὲ διανοίας ἡ διάλεκτος· καὶ ὅλως ὁ προφορικός λόγος τοῦ ἐνδιαθέτου (*de iudicandi facultate* 2).

A similar picture is found in Plutarch, who also highlights the clear causal priority of the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος. Making use of the mythological distinction between Hermes the Leader and the Hermes the Messenger, Plutarch identifies the λόγος προφορικός with the latter and argues that it is

<sup>73</sup> For much of the information in this section, we are dependent upon the *TLG* CD ROM.

<sup>74</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.65; Philo, *Special Laws* 4.69; Porphyry, *in Aristot. Categ.* 4.1.64.

<sup>75</sup> Edwards (2000), p. 161 should not have missed the evidence of Galen when he claims that there is only one example of the coupling of λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and λόγος προφορικός in *SVF*. Although Galen does not use the term λόγος προφορικός, he is obviously referring to the same theory; λόγος κατὰ φωνήν is simply a paraphrase.

<sup>76</sup> Edwards (2000), p.161. Edwards has missed the important evidence of Ptolemy.

somehow ‘stale’, being one remove from the original thought: τὸ δὲ λέγειν ὅτι δύο λόγοι εἰσίν, ὁ μὲν ἐνδιάθετος . . . ὁ δ’ ἐν προφορᾷ διάκτορος καὶ ὀργανικός, ἑωλόν ἐστιν (*maxime cum principibus* 777B). Plutarch’s discussion is particularly interesting, in that the λόγος προφορικός is cast in the guise of an instrument or servant of the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος. As we have seen, it was precisely this kind of subordinate rôle that was envisaged by the Apologists for *their* second-stage Logos.

Finally, we refer the reader to a brief comment made by Plotinus. At *Ennead* 5.1.3, Plotinus compares the procession of Soul from Intellect to the speaking of a thought: Intellect is compared to the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and Soul to the λόγος προφορικός. The important point for us to note is that the ‘processed logos’ is again described as the image (εἰκὼν) of the ‘interior logos’.

From this brief over-view, we can conclude that the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος is interior, silent thought and that the λόγος προφορικός is the spoken version of this same thought, typically expressed as discourse or argument. It is clear from the evidence of Ptolemy, Plutarch and Plotinus that the λόγος προφορικός is that by which our thoughts (the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) are expressed: the former is thus the ‘image’ of the latter.

The Apologists of the second century seized upon this philosophical common-place to illustrate a number of important theological points. (1) The image was primarily used to show that the second-stage Logos was not a new creation, created *ex nihilo*, but that it had been eternally present within the divine mind, or rather *as* the divine mind. As the spoken word necessarily pre-exists as a thought, so the creative Logos pre-exists as the Father’s rationality. Thus the Apologists insist that the second-stage Logos did not ‘come to be’ (οὐχ ὡς γενόμενον), but merely ‘processed’. It is not entirely correct however to speak of the *identity* of the two Logoi. The relationship between the two is rather one of image or reflection, as the spoken word is an image or reflection of its preceding thought. (2) The image also illustrates how the procession of the Logos did not deprive the Father of his powers of reason, did not render him ἄλογος. Tatian makes precisely this point: “The word coming forth from the Father does not deprive the begetter of the power of rational speech. I speak and you hear: yet surely when I address you, I am not myself deprived of speech through the transmission of speech” (*Oratio*

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<sup>77</sup> As is clearly stated in chapter 5 of the *de iudicandi facultate*.

1.5, trans. Whittaker). Justin similarly argues that the begetting (speaking) of a logos does not diminish the logos which remains within the speaker (*Dialogue with Trypho* 61). (3) Finally, the image illustrates how the procession of the Logos was entirely incorporeal and how it did not reduce the Father in any way. The Apologists were particularly keen to stress this point in order to refute the Gnostic claim that the Son was a *προβολή* of the Father. The image of the Son as the spoken word is the perfect illustration of a non-physical generation. So Tatian insists that the Son did not come into being *κατὰ ἀποκοπήν*; he is not severed or divided (*κεχώρισται*) from the Father (*Oratio* 1.5). Justin makes a similar point. Speaking, the begetting of a word, does not involve ‘cutting off’ or ‘severance’, so neither does the procession of the Son (*Dialogue with Trypho* 61).<sup>78</sup>

(1.5)

It is very important to recognize how the Apologists do not regard the Father and the Son as integral and complementary components of the one Godhead. Each is complete in and by himself: the rationality of the Father, for instance, exists eternally, irrespective of the rationality of the Son. The Apologist doctrine of the two-stage Logos makes sense only if one accepts that the Father alone is a complete and perfect God and that he requires the Son only at a later stage to be his instrument and mediator *ad extra*. The Apologists cannot therefore be properly labelled ‘Trinitarians’. There is no sense that the Son and the Holy Ghost have any contribution to make to the life of God. On the contrary, the Apologists constantly preached the eternal self-sufficiency of an independently existing Father. Such is their insistence on monotheism,<sup>79</sup> the necessary rejection of pagan polytheism, that there is no adequate cognisance of the Trinity.<sup>80</sup> When the Apologists speak of ‘God’, they almost invariably mean God the Father. So, for example, in Theophilus’ long description of God in chapters 3-6 of the *ad Autolycum*, there is no reference to the Son or to the Holy Ghost. We are left with the strong impression that, had there been no creation, there would have been no Trinity. The Son and the Holy Ghost are simply the necessary means for creating the world, caring for it and redeeming it. They have no effect upon the Father and no relevance for him, other than allowing him to remain in transcendent peace, while his minions toil away.

<sup>78</sup> On this use of the image, see Stead (1977), p.169.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Athenagoras, *Embassy* 4-8, 4 chapters devoted to proving that God is one. Tatian, *Oratio* 1.4, places monotheism at the top of his list of theological credos. Edwards (2002), pp.67 and 69 comments upon the Apologist insistence on Monotheism.

<sup>80</sup> This was also in response to strict Jewish monotheism. It must be remembered that at this date the Jews as well as the pagans were criticizing the new faith. Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* is an apology

It would seem therefore that the Apologists have fallen foul of the Monarchian heresy.<sup>81</sup> Like the Monarchians, the Apologists believe that there is but one God who contains within himself all the divine attributes, *merely as attributes* of his one undivided being. We have already seen how the Apologists argue that in the period before creation, when the Father was alone, he was not without reason, without will, without power or without wisdom. All were eternally immanent within him. There was no need for an independently existing Son to provide the Godhead with these essentials. The Apologists also insist on the self-sufficiency and independence of the Father *after* the procession of the Word. He still remains complete and perfect, in possession *by himself alone* of all the divine attributes. It is with this in mind that the Apologists insist that the processed Logos did not diminish or effect in any way the Logos that remained within God the Father. Although he has sent forth a Logos who is to be identified with reason, will, wisdom and power, the Father is not thereby rendered ἄλογος, ἄσοφος, ἄβουλετος, and ἄδυνατος. With post-Nicene hindsight, one might be tempted to interpret this claim as an acknowledgement of the Trinitarian οἰκονομία, i.e. that the Son has now become the reason, will, wisdom and power of the Father. I feel however that the Apologist scheme was entirely different from this. Following the procession of the Son, there were *two* wills, *two* reasons, *two* wisdoms and *two* powers. The image of the two torches, used by both Justin and Tatian,<sup>82</sup> illustrates precisely this point. Although a second torch is lit, the first remains exactly as it was before. The image of the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and the λόγος προφορικὸς carries the same implication. As the spoken word does not deprive the speaker of his power of rational thought, so the processed Logos does not deprive the Father of his eternal, internal Logos. We therefore reach the conclusion that, for the Apologists, the existence of the Son is irrelevant to the Father: he exists merely in relation to temporal creation.

(1.6)

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dealing with specifically Jewish complaints. In the first section of the *True Word*, Celsus assumes the guise of the Jew and argues from a peculiarly Jewish perspective.

<sup>81</sup> Bardy (1943), p.56 seems to agree with me: “on peut alors se demander si, en appuyant comme le fait sur l’unité, Athénagore ne risque pas de compromettre la réalité des personnes et s’il ne donne pas de la foi chrétienne un énoncé qui préparait en quelque sorte le Sabellianisme.” It is interesting to note that Paul of Samosata resurrected the doctrine of the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος as the perfect illustration of his Monarchian doctrine (*apud* Epiphanius, *Haeres.* 65.1.5; passage cited by Grant (1988), p.169). Lawlor (1918), p.41 discusses Paul’s use of λόγος ἐνδιάθετος: this Logos is simply an element of the Father’s personality; it does not exist in ὑπαρξις and is not an ὑπόστασις.

<sup>82</sup> Justin, *Oratio* 5 and Tatian, *Dialogue* 61.

Such then is the Apologist doctrine of the two-stage Logos, the ubiquitous theological paradigm which dominated second and third century Christian theology. Origen would undoubtedly have been aware of the doctrine, whether he encountered it in the classrooms of the catechetical school<sup>83</sup> or through his own voracious reading.<sup>84</sup> Origen's doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son must be seen as a deliberate and conscious rejection of the theology of his immediate predecessors. In sections 3, 4 and 5 of this study, I should like to suggest a possible explanation for this remarkable innovation. But let us begin with a brief overview of the famous doctrine of eternal generation.

## THE ETERNAL GENERATION OF THE SON

### (2.1)

The doctrine of eternal generation, the fundamental doctrine of Origen's Trinitarian system, is discussed and developed in a number of key texts. In chapter 1.2 of the *de Principiis*, Origen begins his long description of Christ with the emphatic assertion of eternal generation: it is irreverent to believe that the Father existed for even a single moment without begetting the Son. Origen attempts to defend this belief by referring to a standard argument of the Greek philosophical schools. If the Son is not eternally begotten, one must suppose either that God was *unwilling* to beget him before he did so or that he was *unable*.<sup>85</sup> Origen tells us that both alternatives are absurd and impious and that one must therefore conclude that the Son is eternally begotten.<sup>86</sup> A little later in the same chapter, Origen challenges those who deny the eternal existence of the Son to explain why the Father delayed begetting him. Origen's response again hinges on the willing/able argument.<sup>87</sup> We find similar claims in the *Commentary on Genesis*, where Origen is keen to refute the view that God began (ἤρξατο) to be a Father at a particular point in time. Origen begins by pointing out that God always had the ability

<sup>83</sup> i.e. if Clement were an exponent of the doctrine.

<sup>84</sup> We can be sure that Origen did read the Apologists, because he refers to them. See, for example, *On Prayer* 24.5 and *Contra Celsum* 6.51.

<sup>85</sup> This argument – the so-called 'willing and able argument' – originates in the tenth book of Plato's *Laws* (10.899D-905C). After Plato, the argument became the standard *entrée* into the perennial topic of innocent suffering: is God *unable* to prevent it or *unwilling* to prevent it? As far as I know, Origen is the first theologian to apply the argument to the eternal generation of the Son. For an over-view of the argument in the ancient philosophical tradition, see Sharples (1995), pp. 6-7.

<sup>86</sup> *quomodo autem extra huius sapientiae generationem fuisse aliquando deum Patrem, vel ad punctum momenti alicuius, potest quis sentire vel credere, qui tamen pium aliquid de deo intelligere noverit vel sentire? aut enim non potuisse deum dicet generare sapientiam, antequam generaret, ut eam quae ante non erat postea genuerit ut esset, aut potuisse quidem et, quod dici quoque de deo nefas est, noluisse generare; quod utrumque et absurdum esse et impium omnibus patet, id est, ut aut ex eo quod non potuit deus proficeret ut posset, aut cum posset dissimularet ac differret generare sapientiam. propter quod nos semper deum patrem novimus unigeniti filii sui (de Principiis 1.2.2).*



(δύναμις) to be a father. Unlike humans, who must wait for puberty until they can reproduce, God is eternally perfect and nothing prevents him from begetting the Son eternally. Origen goes on to point out that it was good /right/proper (καλὸν) for the Father to beget such a Son.<sup>88</sup> The argument is - once again – that God was both willing and able to generate the Son eternally.<sup>89</sup>

At *de Principiis* 1.2.4 Origen uses the image of the sun and its rays as an analogy for the eternal generation of the Son: *est namque ita aeterna ac sempiterna generatio, sicut splendor generatur ex luce*.<sup>90</sup> The image is repeated in chapter 1.2.7, accompanied this time by a brief technical discussion of the precise meaning of ‘eternal’ as that which has no beginning and no end. In the *anacephalaisis*, the summary of the work’s most important doctrines, Origen reminds us that, as the sun cannot exist without emitting light, so the Father cannot exist without generating the Son.<sup>91</sup>

It could perhaps be objected that Origen’s image of the sun and its rays implies a necessary, even unconscious generation, what might be termed an ‘emanation’. This is certainly an important aspect of the image for Plotinus, who repeatedly compares the emanation of Intellect from the One to the emanation of light from the sun.<sup>92</sup> At *Ennead* 5.1.6-7, for example, Plotinus likens Intellect to rays of light and tells us that, like the sun, the One gave no assent (οὐ προσνεύσαντος) and issued no decree (οὐδὲ βουληθέντος), but remained unmoved and unaffected by the emanation of Intellect (ἀκινήτος, οὐδὲ κινηθέντος, μένον, μένοντος).<sup>93</sup> The implication is that the emanation of Intellect was natural, necessary and inevitable (δεῖ πως εἶναι ἐκείνο τὸ γενόμενον). Plotinus goes on to give a brief

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<sup>87</sup> God always had both the ability and the desire to generate the Son: *semper et poterat deus et volebat, numquam vel decuerit vel causa aliqua existere potuerit, ut non hoc, quod bonum volebat, semper habuerit* (*de Principiis* 1.2.9).

<sup>88</sup> οὐ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς πατὴρ εἶναι ἤρξατο, κωλυόμενος, ὥς οἱ γινόμενοι πατέρες ἄνθρωποι, ὑπὸ τοῦ μὴ δύνασθαι πῶ πατέρες εἶναι. εἰ γὰρ αἰεὶ τέλειος ὁ θεός, καὶ πάρεστιν αὐτῷ δύναμις τοῦ πατέρα αὐτὸν εἶναι, καὶ καλὸν αὐτὸν εἶναι πατέρα τοῦ τοιοῦτου υἱοῦ, τί ἀναβάλλεται, καὶ ἑαυτὸν τοῦ καλοῦ στερίσκει, καὶ, ὥς ἔστιν εἰπεῖν, ἐξ οὗ δύναται πατὴρ εἶναι υἱοῦ; (*Commentary on Genesis*, P.G. 12 45C).

<sup>89</sup> In fact the willing/able argument is rather flawed in that it begs the all-important question: *why* is it good for the Son to exist eternally? *Why* does God want this? Origen’s answer to this question will form the bulk of the present chapter.

<sup>90</sup> Sorabji (1983), p.116 is right to point out that there is no important semantic difference between *aeterna* and *sempiterna* in Rufinus’ translation: the words are synonyms which are repeated simply for emphasis. It was only later that the terms came to be distinguished as ‘eternal’ and ‘everlasting’ respectively.

<sup>91</sup> Bostock (1975), p.248 and (1992), p.255 and Logan (1980), p.126 both remark that the sun analogy underpins the doctrine of eternal generation. Yet the image has other important functions, on which see section 13.1.

<sup>92</sup> I am grateful to Armstrong (1937) for gathering together all the Plotinian references to the sun and its rays as a metaphor for emanation.

<sup>93</sup> Armstrong (1967), p.241: “There is no deliberate action on the part of the One and no willing or planning or choice or care for what is produced.”

*précis* of the general theory of emanation, according to which all things necessarily produce a secondary hypostasis: snow produces coldness, perfume produces fragrance and fire produces heat. In the same way, the One produces Intellect. At *Ennead* 1.7.1, Plotinus similarly insists that, like the sun, the One remains still (μένειν) and at *Ennead* 5.3.17, we read that it is immobile (ἑστηκότα) and forever unmoved (ἀεὶ μένοντα). At *Ennead* 6.8.18, Plotinus repeats the idea of necessary emanation: as the rays of the sun are not a thing of chance (συντυχία), so neither is Intellect.

Armstrong describes the emanation of Intellect from the One as ‘an over-flowing of superabundant life, the consequence of (the One’s) unbounded perfection.’<sup>94</sup> I believe that this description can also be applied to Origen’s doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. At *de Principiis* 1.2.9, for example, Origen describes the generation of the Son precisely as an emanation. There exists in the Father a power so immense that it has somehow ‘bubbled-over’ and become a separate power:

*huius ergo totius virtutis tantae et tam immensae vapor et, ut dixerim, vigor ipse in propria subsistentia effectus quamvis ex ipsa virtute velut voluntas ex mente procedat, tamen et ipsa voluntas dei nihilominus dei virtus efficitur. efficitur ergo virtus altera in sua proprietate subsistens, ut ait sermo scripturae, vapor quidem primae et ingenitae virtutis dei, hoc quidem quod est, unde trahens.*<sup>95</sup>

In this passage the eternal generation of the Son is described as the natural, inevitable consequence of the Father’s ‘superabundant life’. Despite his use of the language of willing<sup>96</sup> and despite Lyman’s valiant attempts to recast Origen as a Christian voluntarist,<sup>97</sup> Origen obviously preached the necessity and inevitability of the eternal generation of the Son. God chooses neither *when* nor *whether* to generate him.<sup>98</sup> The image of the sun and its rays is the perfect illustration of this belief. As Origen clearly states at *de Principiis* 4.4.1, the existence of sunlight is coterminous and concomitant with the existence of the sun. An eternal sun emanates eternal light.

<sup>94</sup> Armstrong (1967), p.241.

<sup>95</sup> See section 4.3 for a further discussion of this passage, particularly Origen’s insistence on the *propria subsistentia* of the second power.

<sup>96</sup> A category which even Plotinus was willing to apply to the One (*Ennead* 6.8).

<sup>97</sup> Lyman (1992), pp.39-81.

<sup>98</sup> Like Plotinus, Origen understood that the possession of will in the sense of the liberty of indifference was a characteristic of the lower orders from which God was blissfully exempt. To believe that the Son was willed into existence would make his existence worryingly precarious: he could just as easily *not* have existed. See chapter 3, section 8.4.1 for a discussion of the proper way to interpret the divine will in Origen’s theology.

It is very important to appreciate that the image of the sun and its rays implies a continuous begetting. Bethune-Baker is right to stress that this is a doctrine of *eternal* and not merely timeless generation.<sup>99</sup> The Son is continuously generated by the Father as rays of light are continuously generated by the sun. It is not the case that the Son was generated at some particular point, outside time, and was thereafter left to his own devices, left, as it were, to fend for himself. In Origen's Trinitarian system, the Son relies absolutely on his Father for his continued existence. As rays of light cannot exist without the sun, so the Son cannot exist without the constant succour and constant support of his Father.

This idea of *continuous* generation is most clearly stated in the 9th *Homily on Jeremiah*. Commenting on Proverbs 8.25, Origen draws attention to the odd use of the present tense in Wisdom's claim that the Lord  $\pi\rho\acute{o}$  πάντων βουνῶν γεννᾷ με. Origen explains this oddity by interpreting the verse as a reference to eternal generation. It is not the case that the Son 'was born' or 'has been born', but that he is 'always being born'. This passage is very important and should be quoted in full:

ἴδωμεν δὲ τίς ἡμῶν ἐστὶν ὁ σωτὴρ· "ἀπαύγασμα δόξης." τὸ ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης οὐχὶ ἅπαξ γεγέννηται καὶ οὐχὶ γεννᾶται· ἀλλὰ ὅσον ἐστὶν τὸ "φῶς" ποιητικὸν τοῦ ἀπαυγάσματος, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον γεννᾶται τὸ ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ. ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν "σοφία" ἐστὶν "τοῦ θεοῦ"· ἐστὶν δὲ ἡ σοφία "ἀπαύγασμα φωτὸς αἰδίου". εἰ οὖν ὁ σωτὴρ αἰεὶ γεννᾶται, -καὶ διὰ τοῦτο λέγει· "πρὸ δὲ πάντων βουνῶν γεννᾷ με", οὐχὶ δὲ πρὸ δὲ πάντων βουνῶν γεγέννηκέν με, ἀλλὰ· "πρὸ πάντων βουνῶν γεννᾷ με" (*Homilies in Jeremiah* 9.4).

The doctrine of eternal generation plays a very important rôle in the first two books of the *Commentary on St John*. At *Commentary on St John* 1.29 (31), commenting on the famous verse – *Today have I begotten thee* (Psalm 2.7) – Origen points out that for God every day is today.<sup>100</sup> The Son is therefore born 'every day', not yesterday nor today, but always:

οὐ σαφῶς ἡ εὐγένεια παρίσταται τοῦ υἱοῦ, ὅτε δὲ τὸ "υἱός μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε" "λέγεται πρὸς αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ᾧ αἰεὶ ἐστὶ τὸ "σήμερον", - οὐκ ἓν γὰρ ἐσπέρα θεοῦ, ἐγὼ δὲ ἡγούμαι, ὅτι οὐδὲ πρωΐα, ἀλλὰ ὁ συμπεκτείνων τῇ ἀγενήτῳ καὶ αἰδίῳ αὐτοῦ ζωῇ, ἵν' οὕτως εἰπω χρόνος ἡμέρα ἐστὶν αὐτῷ σήμερον, ἐν ᾗ γεγέννηται ὁ υἱός - ἀρχῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ οὕτως οὐχ εὐρισκομένης ὥς οὐδὲ τῆς ἡμέρας.

<sup>99</sup> Bethune-Baker (1933), pp.147-8. See also Bigg (1913), p.219 for a similar emphasis on the *continuous* begetting of the Son.

<sup>100</sup> On this interpretation of 'today' compare *Commentary on St John* 32.32 (19), *à propos* Christ's words to the Good Thief – *Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise* (Luke 22.43). The main point of the exegesis is that in the Bible the word 'today' (σήμερον) is always used to mean 'eternity': ὅτι πολλαχού τὸ "σήμερον" ἐν τῇ γραφῇ καὶ ἐπὶ ὅλον παρατείνει τὸν ἐνεσθηκότα αἰῶνα.

This passage is very similar to the passage from the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, quoted above. In both, Origen argues that the Son is eternally generated by the Father and is therefore eternally dependent upon him. It could thus be argued that Origen's theory of eternal generation reduces the status of the Son to that of an eternally contingent being. Without the Father's constant support, the Son would cease to exist.<sup>101</sup>

Origen further defends the theory of eternal generation by drawing attention to the use of the verb 'to be' in the proem of the fourth Gospel – *in the beginning was the Word* (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος). Origen compares this statement with a common Old Testament trope. The prophetic books often begin with the phrase *The word of the Lord came to Isaiah/Jeremiah/ Hosea*.<sup>102</sup> The verb used in the Greek version of these verses is γινέσθαι. Origen then develops a detailed and important exegesis based on the difference between γινέσθαι and εἶναι. While the 'word of the Lord' *comes to* the prophets at a particular time and inspires those who were not previously inspired, the 'Word of the Lord' eternally is with the Father:

ἄλλα πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πρότερον οὐ χωροῦντας τὴν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, λόγου τυγχάνοντος, ἐπιδημίαν ὁ λόγος γίνεται· πρὸς δὲ τὸν θεόν οὐ γίνεται, ὡς πρότερον οὐκ ὦν πρὸς αὐτόν, παρὰ δὲ τὸ αἰεὶ συνεῖναι τῷ πατρὶ λέγεται· "καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν"· οὐ γὰρ "εγένετο πρὸς τὸν θεόν". καὶ ταῦτόν ῥῆμα τὸ "ἦν" τοῦ λόγου κατηγορεῖται, ὅτε "ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν" καὶ ὅτε "πρὸς τὸν θεόν ἦν", οὔτε τῆς ἀρχῆς χωριζόμενος οὔτε τοῦ πατρὸς ἀπολειπόμενος, καὶ πάλιν οὔτε ἀπὸ τοῦ μὴ εἶναι "ἐν ἀρχῇ" γινόμενος "ἐν ἀρχῇ" οὔτε ἀπὸ τοῦ μὴ τυγχάνειν "πρὸς τὸν θεόν" ἐπὶ τὸ "πρὸς τὸν θεόν" εἶναι γινόμενος· πρὸ γὰρ παντὸς χρόνου καὶ αἰῶνος "ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος", καὶ "ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν" (*Commentary on St John* 2.1 (1)).

Having established that Origen believed the Son to be eternally generated by the Father, we must now attempt to discover the theological motivation behind this momentous 'paradigm shift'. Why was Origen so keen to reject the ubiquitous Trinitarian paradigm of the two-stage Logos? It seems to me that there are two main reasons for this.

- (1) Origen believes, against the Apologists, that the Son exists for the fullness of the Godhead, irrespective of any future rôles in creation, providence and redemption. He is not merely a functionary or tool of the Father, but the substantiation of essential divine attributes. As such, he

<sup>101</sup> The arguments of these passages are very similar to Plotinus' claims in the *Enneads*. See section 10.1-10.2 for a discussion of Plotinus' theory of the utter dependence of the second hypostasis on the first and of the similarity of this theory to Origen's Trinitarian doctrine.

<sup>102</sup> Isaiah 1.2.1, Jeremiah 2.1.1, Hosea 1.1.1.

does not come into existence at a particular time, to fulfil a particular purpose, but must exist eternally.

- (2) Origen believes, against the Monarchians, that the Son must exist eternally as an individual and distinct οὐσία. He is not merely an immanent attribute of God the Father.

In the following sections of this study, we shall thoroughly examine both these points.

## THE RÔLE OF THE SON WITHIN THE GODHEAD

### (3.1)

Although Origen believed that the tasks of creation and providence must be delegated to the Son and although he writes fully and eloquently on the Son's function as a quasi-Platonic Demiurge, this rôle is quite obviously secondary.<sup>103</sup> While for the Apologists, the Son's entire *raison d'être* was to be a functionary and an intermediary *ad extra*, the necessary bridge between the transcendent God and the created world, Origen's Son enjoys an eternal and integral rôle within the Godhead itself. For Origen, the Son exists primarily for God, not merely *vis-à-vis* the external, temporal creation. Without the Son, God would lack fundamental attributes of divinity. This is entirely different from the Apologist doctrine of the eternal self-sufficiency of the Father. We have already discussed how the Apologists viewed the Father as complete and perfect in himself and the Son as simply a temporary economic necessity which had no effect upon the eternal nature of the Father.<sup>104</sup> We concluded that for the Apologists the Father alone, the Father by himself, is God. In direct and obvious contrast to this paradigm, Origen views the Son as a necessary and eternal aspect of the divine nature.<sup>105</sup> In this, Williams and Widdecombe are correct to see an important foretaste of orthodox Trinitarian theology.<sup>106</sup> Origen pre-empted the orthodox conclusion by recognizing that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are integral members of the one God-head, indispensable to the very definition of God. He is, in short, the first Trinitarian theologian.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>103</sup> See section 11.3 for a full discussion of the Son's rôle in creation etc.

<sup>104</sup> See Lyman (1993), p.51 for the phrase 'temporary economic' necessity.

<sup>105</sup> Lyman (1985), pp.258-9 has also recognized this important aspect of Origen's theology.

<sup>106</sup> Williams (1987), p.143; Widdecombe (1997), p.91. Balas (1975), p.260 relegates Origen to the Apologist camp when he argues that, for the Alexandrian, 'God' = 'God the Father'. In making this remark, Balas has entirely missed the great Trinitarian revolution instigated by Origen.

<sup>107</sup> There is however an important difference to be noted. The orthodox doctrine of eternal generation was developed against the background of the Arian controversy: its whole aim and purpose was to defend the status and position of the Son against the blasphemous suggestion of the Arians that he was a mere creature. In contrast to this, Origen's whole concern was with the Father: to deny the eternal generation of the Son is a blasphemy against the Father, not against the Son. If there were a time when the Son did not exist, the Father would be unfinished and incomplete. On this important point, see Wiles (1961), p. 286.

Origen asserts that each person has a distinct, yet complementary function within the Trinity. Each has his own particular rôle and his own particular sphere of influence.<sup>108</sup> In the first three chapters of the *de Principiis*, devoted to a detailed description of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, there is no over-lap and no repetition of rôle or function. Each has his own nature, his own titles, his own attributes and his own particular tasks. For example, the Father and only the Father is called 'mind'; the Son and only the Son is called 'wisdom' and 'reason'. In chapters 1.3.7-8 of the *de Principiis*, Origen details the 'special activity' and 'special ministry' of the three first principles. The Father bestows existence, the Son bestows rationality and the Spirit bestows sanctity. Origen then quotes I Corinthians 12.4-7 to prove that in the Trinity there are *diversities of gifts, differences of administrations and diversities of operations*. The same verse is quoted at *Commentary on St John* 2.10 (6), to illustrate the same point. In the anointing of the saints, each member of the Trinity has his own peculiar part to play: "the material of these gifts is made powerful by God, is ministered by Christ and owes its actual existence in men to the Holy Ghost" (trans. Menzies, adapted).

The Son's function as complementing or as perfecting the Father is evident throughout the *de Principiis*. Origen's description of God the Father in chapter 1 of the *de Principiis* carefully resists anything that is specifically Christian. This is not an analysis of the Biblical deity, but rather of a metaphysical First Principle.<sup>109</sup> In common with Numenius, Origen believes that the First God is simply intellect. He is *intellectualis natura simplex; mens; natura illa simplex et tota mens* (*de Principiis* 1.1.6-7). But a mind without a will is sterile, inert and unable to act. It is thus necessary for the Son to exist to be God's will: he proceeds from the Father as an act of will proceeds from the mind (*de Principiis* 1.2.6; 4.4.1). Without the Son, God would be without a will.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, Origen insists that the Son is the wisdom of God, without whom God could not be wise (*de Principiis* 1.2.1-2). To deny the eternal generation of the Son, to believe that there was a time when he did not exist, is an impiety against the Father, implying that he was once ἄσοφος (*de Principiis* 1.2.3).<sup>111</sup> These ideas are summed up in the *anacephalaisis* at the end of the work:

<sup>108</sup> Lyman (1993), pp.50-51 is right to highlight the way in which Origen ascribes different kinds of activity to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but she is wrong to restrict the distinctions within the Godhead to such economic criteria. As we shall later see, Origen responded to the Monarchian threat by positing a much more thorough and more fundamental distinction.

<sup>109</sup> Where is the loving Father of the Bible, the beneficent and omniscient director of sacred history?

<sup>110</sup> See Dorner (1861), p.129: "In Origen's view, there existed in God no actual will prior to the Son: the Son himself was first this will."

<sup>111</sup> Edwards (2002), p.67: "Unless we are prepared to say that there was a time when God was without his wisdom, Origen reasons, we cannot put a beginning to the existence of the Logos."

“How then can it be said that there was once a time when the Son did not exist? For this is nothing else but to say that there was once a time when truth did not exist, when wisdom did not exist, when life did not exist” (*de Principiis* 4.4.1, trans. Butterworth).<sup>112</sup>

The argument here seems to be remarkably similar to the orthodox refutation of Arianism. In various works, Athanasius highlights what he sees as the blasphemous implication of the Arian doctrine of the temporal creation of the Logos: if there were a time when the Logos did not exist, throughout that time God the Father must have been ἄλογος and ἄσοφος (*de Decretis* 4 and 26; *contra Arianos* 1.14, 2.32, 3.63, 4.14).<sup>113</sup> Indeed, in his *Epistle on the Decrees of the Council of Nicaea*, Athanasius feels able to quote from the *de Principiis* in support of his anti-Arian polemic: “Let the man who dares to say that there was a time when the Son was not understand that he will be saying ‘Once wisdom did not exist and word did not exist and life did not exist’.”<sup>114</sup> This argument is so very similar to the Rufinian version that we can only conclude, with Koetschau, that Athanasius has preserved a Greek fragment of *de Principiis* 4.4.1.

The belief that the Son must exist eternally insofar as he is to be identified with eternal divine attributes is repeated in the *Commentary on Ephesians*. Commenting on Ephesians 1.1, Origen explicitly states that the Son is the power of God, the wisdom of God and the will of God:

ἐπιστήσεις δὲ καὶ περὶ τοῦ θελήματος τοῦ θεοῦ εἰ δύναται τάσσεσθαι ἐπὶ Χριστοῦ· ἵν' ὥσπερ ἐστὶ θεοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεοῦ σοφία, οὕτως ἦ καὶ θέλημα αὐτοῦ (*Commentary on Ephesians*, fragment 10).

Without the Son, the Father would be without power, without wisdom and without will. In the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, Origen explicitly argues that πάντα γὰρ ὅσα τοῦ θεοῦ τοιαῦτά ἐστιν, ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν. This remark is explained and elaborated by the claim that Christ is the wisdom of God, the power of God, the justice of God and the reason of God (*Hom. on Jerem.* 8.2). This is very similar to the remarks made at *Commentary on St John* 3.31(9), where Origen again describes the Son as the word, wisdom, justice, truth and power of God. At *Commentary on St John* 2.19 (13), Origen explicitly defends the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son by denying that the Father could ever be ἄλογος: the Son, as the wisdom of God, must exist eternally. Similarly, commenting on Proverbs 1.2, Origen identifies

<sup>112</sup> Wolinski (1995), p.488 has written, *à propos* this passage, that the Son is ‘integral to the life of God.’

<sup>113</sup> See especially Wiles (1989) and Stead (1964) for a discussion of Athanasius’ criticisms of Arianism. Athanasius has of course misunderstood Arius’ theology. As we have shown above, Arius believed in the existence of two entirely distinct Logoi. One was created *ex nihilo*, at a particular time and for the particular purpose of creating the world. The other exists eternally and unchangeably as the mind of God. God was never therefore ἄλογος or ἄσοφος.

the Son with the power and wisdom of God: Χριστὸς γὰρ θεοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεοῦ σοφία (*Fragmenta in Proverbia*, P.G. 13, 20A). Finally, we have the evidence of Calcidius, who quotes Origen as believing that *neque enim tempus ullum, quo Deus fuerit sine sapientia* (*Commentary on the Timaeus*, 76).

(3.2)

It is in the first two books of the *Commentary on St John* that Origen most fully develops this new Trinitarian theology. These books were written at the same time as the *de Principiis* and contain an elaboration and repetition of many of the same themes.<sup>115</sup> Most important for the present study is the re-iterated claim that the Son exists in and for God himself, irrespective of any future rôles relating to creation. The famous doctrine of the ἐπίνοιαί of Christ illustrates precisely this point. The crux of the argument is the categorizing of the various Christological titles (ἐπίνοιαί) into two groups. The first group, comprising most of the Christological titles (e.g. Redemption, Sanctification, Shepherd, Way, Rod, Vine, Door), details the Son's relations to temporal creation, usually his dealings with fallen man. Origen is very careful to point out that these ἐπίνοιαί are not constitutive or descriptive of the Son's eternal and essential nature. They describe merely a temporary economic necessity, the forced response to an unplanned situation.<sup>116</sup> Origen illustrates this argument by analyzing the Evangelist's claim that *in him was life* (John 1.3). Coupling this claim with the second half of the verse – *and the life was the light of men* – Origen concludes that the ἐπίνοια 'Life' is not a description of Christ's eternal nature, but is merely a consequence of creation. The argument is as follows. Before there were men, there could be no *light of men*; if *life* is the *light of men*, before there were men, there was no *life*:

ἀλλὰ ζωὴ ἐγένετο, εἴ γε "ζωὴ ἐστὶ τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων". ὅτε γὰρ οὐδέπω ἄνθρωπος ἦν, οὐδὲ "φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων" ἦν, τοῦ φωτὸς τῶν ἀνθρώπων κατὰ τὴν πρὸς ἀνθρώπους σχέσιν νοουμένου (*Commentary on St John* 2.19 (13)).

Origen believes that the majority of the Christological titles describe the Son's relations to us (ἡμῖν): because of man and his sin, Christ was obliged to become (γίγνεσθαι) a variety of new personae and to take on a whole range of new tasks. At *Commentary on St John* 1.20 (22), Origen argues in some detail that Christ *became* the 'First Born of the Dead', the 'Shepherd', the 'Physician', the 'Redeemer' and

<sup>114</sup> This quotation is explicitly ascribed to the 'labour-loving Origen'.

<sup>115</sup> For the chronology of Origen's writings, see Harl (1957), pp. 379-386.

<sup>116</sup> Bigg (1913), p.210 calls them 'accidental accretions.'



the 'King' only as a consequence of the Fall. These are titles which were conferred on him at a later date; they are not descriptions of his eternal nature.<sup>117</sup>

Moreover, Origen is very clear that, as this first group of ἐπίνοιαι are required only at a particular time and only in response to a particular situation, so the time will come when they will no longer be needed. Instructed, purged and purified, we shall finally be able to understand Christ as he is in himself,<sup>118</sup> not merely in relation to us. That is to say, this first group of ἐπίνοιαι comprises simply temporary pedagogic tools. The doctrine of the ἐπίνοιαι epitomizes the major strand of Origen's pedagogic theory, i.e. the grading of Christian instruction to suit the spiritual and intellectual capacity of the individual pupil. For Origen, the learning process is a process of gradual advancement through a series of carefully graded hierarchies. So Christ reveals himself progressively, bit by bit, until we are able to bear the full revelation of the real and essential Christ, Christ himself. In condescension to the weakness and immaturity of fallen man, Christ is obliged to become what he is not, to disguise his essential nature and to appear in a rôle suited to our present state. The Incarnation is of course the supreme example of this pedagogic condescension.<sup>119</sup> For those unable to understand God as God, he appears as man. He *becomes* what he is not. But the crux of the argument is that the Incarnation is merely the necessary first stage, a stage which we can and must transcend as we grow and develop as Christians. Eventually, we shall understand God as God and not God as man. The same can be said of all the Christological titles in this first group. The perfect (τέλειος) Christian will no longer see Christ as the Vine, the Door, the Rod etc., but simply and essentially (ἀπλῶς) as himself.<sup>120</sup> The crucial point about this first group of ἐπίνοιαι is that they do not describe Christ as he really is, but refer simply to our present point of view.

In contrast to these extrinsic, temporal and relational ἐπίνοιαι, Origen posits another group of Christological titles which describe the true and eternal nature of Christ, Christ as 'wisdom', 'word' and 'power'.<sup>121</sup> While the first group is characterized as ἡμῖν /πρὸς ἡμᾶς ('to/towards us'), the second

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<sup>117</sup> On this passage and the general argument, see Wolinski (1995), pp.474, 483-4 and Crouzel (1980), pp.132 and 141.

<sup>118</sup> The descriptions of Christ as he is in himself form the second group of ἐπίνοιαι, discussed below.

<sup>119</sup> So Harl (1958), p.114.

<sup>120</sup> See *Commentary on St John* 1.20 (22) for a description of the progress of the Christian from the contemplation of the lower ἐπίνοιαι to an understanding of αὐτοῦ τὰ κάλλιστα. See chapter 3, section 5.3 for a further discussion of these important points, including relevant quotations.

<sup>121</sup> An interesting parallel to this classification of the Christological titles is Tertullian's debate with the Gnostic Hermogenes. Hermogenes claimed that creation must be eternal, because God's title 'Dominus' requires the existence of something over which he might be 'Dominus'. In response to this,

group describes Christ as he is in and for himself (αὐτῷ, ἑαυτῷ), ‘simply’ and ‘essentially’ (ἀπλῶς).<sup>122</sup>

As Grillmeier puts it, ‘the *epinoiai* are partly absolute and partly relative (for us).’<sup>123</sup> While the first group describes what Christ becomes (γινέσθαι), the second describes what he is (εἶναι).<sup>124</sup> For example, when St John tells us that “in the beginning *was* the word”, he is describing Christ’s eternal nature as the Logos. As we have seen, this is contrasted with ‘Life’, which he *became*.<sup>125</sup> In this second group of ἐπίνοιαι are those titles which describe Christ’s rôle within the Godhead, his internal and essential attributes.<sup>126</sup> Origen even suggests that there are some divine attributes which have absolutely no relevance for man; as such, they will never be known (*Commentary on St John* 2.18 (12)).<sup>127</sup>

Wolinski cites *Commentary on St John* 1.17 (20) as the *locus classicus* for the doctrine of the two tier ἐπίνοιαι.<sup>128</sup> Origen explicitly contrasts Christ’s divinity, which is his ‘nature’ (φύσις), as the wisdom and power of God, with his manhood, which is purely relational (πρὸς ἡμᾶς) and subjective: for those unable to grasp the whole truth, he appeared as man. These remarks form part of an extended commentary on St John’s opening claim, *In the beginning was the word* (John 1.1). Origen starts by detailing the various possible meanings of the word *beginning* (ἀρχή). In the following passage, he is considering ἀρχή as the ἀρχή μαθήσεως:

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Tertullian divides the divine titles into two groups. In the first group are those titles which describe God’s eternal, essential and unchangeable nature, e.g. the title ‘God’ (*Dei nomen dicimus semper fuisse apud semetipsum et in semetipso*). In the second group are those titles which imply relations, which are not grounded in the unchangeable nature of God and which are not therefore eternal (e.g. ‘Dominus’, ‘Pater’ and ‘Iudex’). God *becomes* a judge only in response to sin; he *becomes* a Father only after begetting the Son; he *becomes* a master only after creating the world. It is clear that Tertullian’s classification has a great deal in common with Origen’s. For both, the distinction is between (a) eternal, unchangeable and essential nature and (b) temporal relations. I am dependent upon Casey (1924), p. 52 for this report of the Tertullian/Hermogenes debate.

<sup>122</sup> So Bigg (1913), p. 210: these ἐπίνοιαι ‘are properties of his Deity which can never change . . . they belong to Christ as properties of his eternal nature.’ See also Crouzel (1980), p.132: these ἐπίνοιαι “ont un fondement dans sa nature, en dehors même de ses rapports avec nous.”

<sup>123</sup> Grillmeier (1965), p. 166.

<sup>124</sup> On this point, see Heine (1993), p.97: “(γινέσθαι) implies a time of not being followed by being; (εἶναι) applies to a continuous state of being.”

<sup>125</sup> Origen insists on this temporal distinction, although he is well aware that it will annoy some readers (*Commentary on St John* 2.19 (13)).

<sup>126</sup> The ἐπίνοιαι ‘wisdom’ and ‘word’ have an external aspect as well as an internal aspect (so, Crouzel (1980), pp.133-7 and Wolinski (1995), p.476). For example, Christ as ‘word’ (‘reason’) makes rational beings rational; Christ as ‘wisdom’ is creator of the world. But it is certainly not the case that this divine title is *always* to be considered in relation to us. I disagree with Wolinski (1995), p.489, who writes that “Origène n’envisage jamais la Sagesse come une hypostase divine sans relation avec le monde.” Edwards (2002), p.73 makes the same mistake when he writes that “whatever is predicated of (wisdom) is held to be true by virtue of her actions in this world.”

<sup>127</sup> Passage cited by Wolinski (1995), pp.476-7.

<sup>128</sup> Wolinski (1995), p.474. He also cites *Commentary on St John* 1.34 (39-40) for a similar discussion of the distinctions between ἀπλῶς and ἡμῖν.

διττῇ δὲ ἡ ὡς μαθήσεως ἀρχή, ἡ μὲν τῇ φύσει, ἡ δὲ ὡς πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ὡς εἰ λέγοιμεν ἐπὶ Χριστοῦ, φύσει μὲν αὐτοῦ ἀρχὴ ἡ θεότης, πρὸς ἡμᾶς δέ, μὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ μεγέθους αὐτοῦ δυναμένους ἄρξασθαι τῆς περὶ αὐτοῦ ἀληθείας ἡ ἀνθρωπότης αὐτοῦ, καθ' ὁτοίς νηπίοις καταγγέλλεται Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, καὶ οὗτος ἐσταυρωμένος· ὡς κατὰ τοῦτο εἰπεῖν ἀρχὴν εἶναι μαθήσεως τῇ μὲν φύσει Χριστὸν καθ' ὃ σοφία καὶ δύναμις θεοῦ, πρὸς ἡμᾶς δὲ τὸ "ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο", ἵνα σκηνώσῃ ἐν ἡμῖν, οὕτω μόνον πρῶτον αὐτὸν χωρῆσαι δυναμένοις. καὶ τάχα διὰ τοῦτο οὐ μόνον πρωτότοκός ἐστιν πάσης κτίσεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ "Ἀδάμ", ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται "ἄνθρωπος".

It is clear therefore that the relational ἐπίνοιαι are secondary, both temporally and logically. Christ's dealings with man are certainly not his entire *raison d'être*, as they were for the Apologists. It is very important to recognize this as the fundamental tenet of Origen's Trinitarian theology: the Son exists first and foremost for himself and for the Father. Oddly, this fact seems to have been missed by a number of Patristic scholars. Otis and Grillmeier, for example, explain and justify the doctrine of eternal generation by arguing that an eternally existing creation requires an eternally existing mediator.<sup>129</sup> This unfortunate mis-reading is based upon two false assumptions. The first mistake is to assume that Origen believed that the world, or at least souls, existed eternally. This is certainly not the case. On the contrary, the whole theological scheme of the *de Principiis*, the drama of the eternal rise and fall of souls, is based upon the fact that souls are created *ex nihilo* and are therefore morally wayward and unstable.<sup>130</sup> The belief that Origen preached the eternity of creation is presumably based upon the confusion of the eidetic, noumenal world - which certainly exists eternally (*de Principiis* 1.2.10; 1.4.3-5) - with the phenomenal world.<sup>131</sup> The second mistake is the failure to understand the doctrine of the ἐπίνοιαι, specifically Origen's insistence that Christ's rôle as Mediator and Redeemer of fallen man is simply a temporary economic necessity and not the expression of an essential, primary and eternal nature.<sup>132</sup>

(3.3)

We can conclude therefore that Origen explains and justifies the doctrine of eternal generation by positing the eternal existence of the Son as the *sine qua non* for the eternal existence of essential divine

<sup>129</sup> Otis (1958), pp.103-4; Grillmeier (1965), p.166. Lowry (1936), pp.229 and 231, Tollinton (1932), p.22 and Wiles (1989), p.47 make the same mistake.

<sup>130</sup> See chapter 3, section 8.3 for a further discussion of this important point, including relevant quotations.

<sup>131</sup> This confusion has a venerable pedigree, beginning with Methodius of Olympus (*de Creatis* 2.5). Balas (1975), p.260 rightly warns against confusing the created rational souls with the eternal archetypes.

<sup>132</sup> In describing Origen's doctrine of the Trinity, Otis (1958), p.104 explicitly refers to the 'economic Logos'. This could not be further from Origen's concept of the eternal Logos.

attributes. Without the Son, God would be without a will, without reason and without power. Origen's theology is therefore wholly and fully a *Trinitarian* theology. The eternal existence of the Son is necessary for the completion and perfection of the Godhead itself. With Origen, the Son ceases to be a mere tool or instrument and is finally welcomed as an integral and essential member of the Godhead.

But a question still remains. Why could Origen not have been satisfied with the doctrine of the Logos remaining immanent within the Father? Why did he need to identify the Father's will, wisdom, reason and power with the eternally and independently existing Son? Why could these attributes not simply remain immanent attributes of the Father? I believe that the answer to these questions lies in Origen's life-long mission as a heresy-hunter. I shall argue that Origen's main aim in developing the doctrine of eternal generation was the refutation of Monarchianism.

The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son and the doctrine of Trinitarian distinction are thus intimately connected with one another. We must be careful however that we do not confuse cause and effect. Kelly writes that "the idea that each of the three is a distinct hypostasis from all eternity, not just as manifested in the 'economy', is one of the chief characteristics of (Origen's) doctrine and stems directly from the eternal generation."<sup>133</sup> It seems to me that the real situation was quite the reverse. The doctrine of three distinct hypostases was primary: from this stemmed the eternal generation. It was his desire to defeat the Monarchians that obliged Origen to posit the eternal existence of the Son.

#### ORIGEN AND THE MONARCHIANS

##### (4.1)

The Monarchians were an heretical group which appeared in the mid-second century.<sup>134</sup> None of their writings has survived fully intact, but a sufficient number of fragments remain, in the form of quotations preserved by their orthodox opponents, to allow us to piece together the main lines of their theological system.<sup>135</sup> The foundational tenet of Monarchian theology was the 'oneness' of God, a strict unitarianism which led to the denial of the Trinity and the return to what was seen as a more pure, Jewish notion of Monotheism. Traditional catholic doctrine was dismissed as ditheism or tritheism. Against this, the Monarchians argued that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost were not different (ἕτερος)

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<sup>133</sup> Kelly (1956), p.129.

<sup>134</sup> For much of the information in this section, I rely on Kelly (1956), pp.115-123.

<sup>135</sup> See especially Epiphanius, *Pinarion* 54.1-54.6; 57.1-57.10; 62.1-62.8; Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*; Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum* and *Refutatio* 7.23-9.27; 10.19; 10.23; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56.11, 62.2, 129.1, 129.4 and *Apology* 1.22.

in any way, specifically that there was no numerical distinction within God.<sup>136</sup> Thus it was argued that the names of the three persons of the Trinity did not have any corresponding objective reality, but were simply convenient onomastic labels used to describe different kinds or ‘modes’ of action (ἐνέργεια) performed by the one Godhead.<sup>137</sup> As the sun has three modes of operation – warming, lighting and the actual shape of the sun - while remaining only one sun, so it is with God.<sup>138</sup> The Monarchians strongly objected to the hypostasizing or substantializing of these ἐνέργειαι. They would not accept that the Son or the Holy Ghost was an οὐσία. The only distinction allowed in God was a subjective, onomastic distinction. Hippolytus, quoting Callistus, provides a neat summary of this central Monarchian tenet: ὀνόματι μὲν υἱὸν καὶ πατέρα λεγόμενον καὶ ὀνομαζόμενον, οὐσίᾳ δὲ ἓν ὄντα . . . ὀνόματι μὲν μεριζόμενον, οὐσίᾳ δὲ οὐ (Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 10.27).

The term οὐσία/*substantia* was the key term of the Monarchian controversy. Justin Martyr, for example, reports that the Monarchians believed the Son to be merely an ἐνέργεια and not an οὐσία (*Dialogue with Trypho* 128). Beryl of Bostra, (whom we discuss below, section 4.2), also argued that the pre-existent Christ was not an οὐσία: τὸν σωτῆρα καὶ κύριον ἡμῶν λέγειν τολμῶν μὴ προϋφεστάναι κατ’ ἰδίαν οὐσίας περιγραφὴν (Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.33.1). Hippolytus similarly criticizes Noetus and his followers for believing the Father and the Son to be distinct only in name and not in οὐσία:

καὶ αὐτὸς ὁμολογεῖ ἓνα εἶναι θεὸν τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν δημιουργὸν τοῦ παντός· τοῦτον δὲ εἶναι τὸν λόγον, ὀνόματι μὲν υἱὸν καὶ πατέρα λεγόμενον καὶ ὀνομαζόμενον, οὐσίᾳ δὲ ἓν ὄντα, τὸ πνεῦμα ἀδιαίρετον (*Refutatio* 10.23).

Finally, both Praxeas and Paul of Samosata were rebuked for denying that the Son was an οὐσία.<sup>139</sup> This point will become very important in the following chapter.

Kelly has shown how from the same basic assumption of divine unity arose two entirely different attitudes to the Incarnation.<sup>140</sup> If one believes that the Father and the Son are identical, it becomes impossible to believe that the Son alone was incarnate, sent by his Father to redeem the world. Instead

<sup>136</sup> On this, see Orbe (1991), *passim* and Bigg (1913), p.219.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Modalism’, the alternative name for Monarchianism, refers to this fundamental tenet of the movement.

<sup>138</sup> Sabellius, *apud* Epiphanius, *Panarion* 62.1.

<sup>139</sup> See section 5.1 for a further discussion, including all the relevant quotations.

<sup>140</sup> Which he categorizes as Modalistic Monarchianism and Dynamic Monarchianism. Other scholars make the same point: Cadiou (1935), pp.346-7, Bardy (1929), p.234, Edwards (2000), p.175 and Le Boulluec (1985) II, p.531.

of this, one can conclude either that the Father was also incarnate and suffered along with the Son<sup>141</sup> or that Jesus Christ was a mere man and that neither the Father nor the Son was incarnate.<sup>142</sup> It was because of these two accompanying or correlative heresies that Monarchianism was particularly feared. Unitarianism *tout court* was much less of a worry than either Patripassionism or Adoptionism. If the nature or the reality of the Incarnation is called into question, so too are Salvation and Redemption.<sup>143</sup>

I believe that it was as a direct response and conscious refutation of Monarchianism that Origen developed many of the characteristic features of his Trinitarian theology. The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son and the definitive rejection of the two-stage Logos paradigm can be understood only within this particular polemical context. Although the Son is to be identified with the essential divine attributes of will, power, wisdom and reason, Origen cannot allow that these remain mere attributes. Against such modalism, Origen argues that these divine attributes are hypostasized and substantized as the eternally existing Son. Origen's insistence that the Son is an individual and distinct οὐσία/ὑπόστασις<sup>144</sup> is a direct and deliberate response to the fundamental Monarchian claim that he is merely an ἐνέργεια. The Apologist doctrine of the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος would surely have appeared dangerously close to the horrors of Monarchian theology. Indeed, as we argued in section 1.5, the ubiquitous notion of the eternal self-sufficiency and perfection of the Father, containing within himself all the divine attributes, was virtual Monarchianism. In order to avoid this, Origen was obliged to develop an entirely new theological paradigm that would allow the Son an eternally independent and distinct existence.

This is the thesis proposed in the Introduction. Origen's paradigm shift is the direct result of polemical confrontation. Without the Monarchian threat, there would have been no urgency to amend the old Apologist paradigm of the two-stage Logos. Origen's doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son is thus a perfect example of what Bethune-Baker calls 'progress through conflict'.<sup>145</sup>

(4.2)

Although Edwards is rather scornful of the influence of Monarchianism on the development of Origen's theology,<sup>146</sup> there are other scholars who recognize its important input.<sup>147</sup> We cannot of

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<sup>141</sup> Patripassionism, or Modalistic Monarchianism.

<sup>142</sup> Adoptionism, or Dynamic Monarchianism.

<sup>143</sup> So Cadiou (1935), pp.347-8.

<sup>144</sup> See sections 4.3-5.6.

<sup>145</sup> Bethune-Baker (1933), p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> Edwards (2000), p.175.

course disagree with Edwards that at this date Monarchianism was much more of a problem at Rome than in either Alexandria or Palestine.<sup>148</sup> Rome was indisputably the centre of the controversy. The main proponents of the doctrine, Theodotus, Callistus, Sabellius and the pupils of Noetus, all taught at Rome.<sup>149</sup> Hippolytus, their main opponent, lived and wrote in Rome<sup>150</sup> and Tertullian's various refutations were written in Latin for a Roman readership.<sup>151</sup> But this is an insufficient reason for rejecting the influence of Monarchianism on the development of Origen's theology. Let it first be noted that, although the leading Monarchians finally settled in Rome, they all spent their early years in the East.<sup>152</sup> Their doctrines would certainly have been known in the Greek Church. Let us also recall that Origen went to Rome as a young man (c. 212-215).<sup>153</sup> It is very likely that he would have been caught up in the orthodox controversy with the Monarchians.<sup>154</sup> Jerome even tells us that Origen met Hippolytus, the arch-refuter of Monarchianism.<sup>155</sup>

We also have the important evidence of Eusebius that Origen was sent to examine and to refute the heresy of Beryl, Bishop of Bostra. The main charge against Beryl was that he believed Jesus Christ to have been a mere man. But, as was so often the case, this Adoptionism was the consequence or corollary of Monarchianism. Eusebius explicitly reports that Beryl did not allow the pre-existent Christ his own distinct οὐσία: (Βήρυλλος) ξένα τινὰ τῆς πίστεως παρεισφέρειν ἐπειράτο, τὸν σωτῆρα καὶ

<sup>147</sup> Logan (1985), p.427, Witt (1933), pp.334-5, Bardy (1923), p.25, Heine (1998), pp.57-58 and Orbe (1991). Le Boulluec (1985) II, pp. 521-2 discusses Origen's various engagements with Monarchians, but concludes that their views were of only 'moindre gravité'. According to Le Boulluec, Origen viewed the Monarchians as well-meaning Christians, who had simply lost their way and landed themselves in trouble. I disagree: I see the Monarchians as amongst Origen's major doctrinal opponents.

<sup>148</sup> Edwards (2000), p.175.

<sup>149</sup> The identity of Praxeas, perhaps the most famous of the Monarchians, remains a mystery. Kelly (1958), p.121 suggests that the name was a pseudonym for Pope Callistus. Heine (1998), p.58 admits that Tertullian uses the name as a 'cover for referring to Callistus' views.'

<sup>150</sup> Although Hippolytus wrote in Greek, his theology is best characterized as Western, (so Bethune-Baker (1901), p.73 and Bigg (1913), p. 205).

<sup>151</sup> Bardy (1929), pp. 234-5.

<sup>152</sup> Bardy (1929), p.224 is correct to stress the Eastern origins of the heresiarchs.

<sup>153</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.14.10.

<sup>154</sup> Bigg (1913), p.202, suggests that Origen's visit to Rome would have made him 'keenly alive to the perils of the (Monarchian) crisis.' Bigg goes on to argue that Origen's Trinitarian theology was developed as a direct response to Monarchianism. Trigg (1985), pp.76-80 makes the same point. He even suggests that Origen attended Hippolytus' lectures in Rome and that it was Hippolytus 'who made Origen fully aware of the issues at stake' in contemporary Trinitarian controversies. Bethune-Baker (1933), p.105 reminds us that Sabellius was active in Rome c.198-217, i.e. at the time of Origen's visit. Heine (1998), pp.57-58 is also keen to place Origen's Trinitarian theology within the context of his visit to Rome at the height of the Monarchian crisis.

<sup>155</sup> Jerome, *On Famous Men* 61. Marcovich (1986), p.9 discusses this point.

κύριον ἡμῶν λέγειν τολμῶν μὴ προὔφεστάναι κατ' ἰδίαν οὐσίας περιγραφὴν<sup>156</sup> πρὸ τῆς εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἐπιδημίας μηδὲ μὴν θεότητα ἰδίαν ἔχειν, ἀλλ' ἐμπολιτευομένην αὐτῷ μόνην τὴν πατρικὴν (Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.33.1).<sup>157</sup> Bardy is right also to draw attention to the fragmentary *Commentary on Titus*, where Origen lists the whole *gamut* of contemporary heresy.<sup>158</sup> Monarchianism, as both Adoptionism and Patripassionism, figures prominently:

*sed et eos qui hominem dicunt Dominum Jesum praecognitum et praedestinatum, qui ante adventum carnalem substantialiter et proprie non existerit, sed quod homo natus Patris solam in se habuerit deitatem,*<sup>159</sup> *ne illos quidem sine periculo esse Ecclesiae numero sociari: sicut et illos qui superstitione magis quam religiose, uti ne videantur duos deos dicere, unam eademque subsistentiam Patris et Filii asseverant, id est duo nomina secundum diversitatem causarum recipientem, unam tamen ὑπόστασιν subsistere, id est, unam personam duobus nominibus subiacentem, qui Latine Patripassiani appellantur* (*Commentary on Titus* P.G. 14 1304D).<sup>160</sup>

The *Dialogue with Heraclides* provides further proof of Origen's personal knowledge and experience of Monarchianism. The Trinitarian doctrine developed in this work is an explicit attempt to avoid three specific heresies: Adoptionism, Ditheism and Monarchianism. In chapter 4, Origen refers explicitly to Monarchianism (μοναρχία). He warns the court that they must not fall into the trap of the Monarchians who, in denying the Son, deny also the Father: ἀναιρουντων τὸν υἱὸν ἀναιρουντων καὶ τὸν πατέρα. Those who believe this are rightly 'separated from the Church' (4.4-7).<sup>161</sup>

Faced with such evidence, it seems beyond doubt that Origen was personally acquainted with Monarchianism. For him, it was a dangerous and worryingly prevalent heresy that must be eradicated.

<sup>156</sup> The phrase κατ' ἰδίαν οὐσίας περιγραφὴν is also used by Origen at *Commentary on St John* 2.10 (6): the Monarchians deny this to the Son. Bethune-Baker (1933), pp.99 and 110, Wolinski (1995), pp.485-6 and Edwards (2002), pp.69 and 84 discuss the use and meaning of the term περιγραφὴ in this particular polemical context.

<sup>157</sup> For my discussion of Beryl of Bostra, in particular his Monarchianism, I am mostly reliant upon Bardy (1929), p. 232-4. Orbe (1991), p.40 provides a brief discussion of *H.E.* 6.33.1.

<sup>158</sup> Bardy (1929), p. 232.

<sup>159</sup> Bardy (1929), p.232, Orbe (1991), pp.39-42 and Le Boulluec (1985) II, p.531 all point out that this is very similar to Eusebius' report of Beryl's heresy. That is to say, the heresies listed in the *Commentary on Titus* are likely to reflect Origen's personal knowledge and personal experience.

<sup>160</sup> We must be alert to the anachronistic terminology of this passage, especially the way in which Rufinus translates ὑπόστασις as *persona*. Orbe and Bardy both miss this important point. We discuss in detail the meaning of the term ὑπόστασις in section 8. Despite this quibble however there can be little doubt that Rufinus has kept very close to the original Greek. By the time that Rufinus translated the *Commentary on Titus* (late fourth century), Monarchianism was no longer a danger to the Church and there would have been no particular reason for Rufinus to invent the above passage. We can safely conclude that Origen did indeed regard Monarchianism as one of the most worrying contemporary heresies.

<sup>161</sup> Wolinski (1995), p.475 agrees that this passage is an "allusion explicitement aux monarchianisme."



In conscious and deliberate refutation of this, Origen must prove that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three distinct and individual οὐσίαι and not mere attributes of one indistinguishable Godhead.

(4.3)

Origen's response to the Monarchian threat can be clearly seen in fragment 10 of the *Commentary on Ephesians*, discussed above (section 3.1). As we have seen, Origen begins by identifying the Son as the power of God, the will of God and the wisdom of God. He insists however that these are not mere attributes or modes of operation. They form a separate and individual being (οὐσία). The Son is the substantized or hypostasized (οὐσιωμένων) power of God, will of God and wisdom of God:

ἐπιστήσεις δὲ καὶ περὶ τοῦ θελήματος τοῦ θεοῦ εἰ δύναται τάσσεσθαι ἐπὶ Χριστοῦ· ἵν' ὥσπερ ἐστὶ θεοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεοῦ σοφία, οὕτως ἦ καὶ θέλημα αὐτοῦ, Θεοῦ ὑπόστασιν ἔχον αὐτόν· ἐὰν δέ τινι ἀπεμφαῖνον φαίνεται οὐσιώσθαι λέγειν τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ θέλημα, ἐπιστησάτω εἰ μὴ ἡ δοκοῦσα ἀπέμφασις παραπλήσιός ἐστι καὶ ἐπὶ δυνάμεως Θεοῦ καὶ σοφίας Θεοῦ καὶ λόγου Θεοῦ . . . παραπλήσις γάρ μοι δοκεῖ τυγχάνειν περὶ πάντων τούτων, ὡς οὐσιωμένων ἐν τῷ μονογενεῖ λόγῳ.

We find similar remarks at *de Principiis* 1.2.2. Having identified Christ as the Wisdom of God, Origen is quick to pre-empt a potentially embarrassing mis-reading of this claim: "Let no one think, however, that when we give him the name 'wisdom of God' we mean *aliquid insubstantivum*" (trans. Butterworth). To view divine wisdom as 'something insubstantial', i.e. an immanent divine attribute, was of course a distinctive tenet of Monarchian theology. Against this, Origen insists that Wisdom is a separate, individual *substantia*. As Orbe points out, Origen is keen to distinguish wisdom as a mere passing quality, as it is for example in humans, from the eternal and hypostatic Wisdom of God: "entre hombres la sabiduría no pasa de ser un accidente o una cualidad, en sí insubsistente. Hay el hombre sabio. No hay humana sabiduría subsistente. En Dios la Sabiduría subsiste y es engendrada; idéntica en persona al Unigénito Hijo de Dios."<sup>162</sup> When we speak of the Wisdom of God, it is in no way analogous to the way in which we speak of an ordinary being (*animal quoddam*) as wise:

*nemo tamen putet nos insubstantivum dicere, cum eum 'Dei Sapientiam' nominamus: id est, ut exempli causa finxerim, quod eum non velut animal quoddam sapiens, sed rem aliquam, quae sapientes efficiat, intelligamus, praebentem se et mentibus eorum, qui capaces virtutum eius atque intelligentiae fiunt. si ergo semel recte receptum est, Unigenitum Filium Dei Sapientiam eius esse substantialiter*

<sup>162</sup> Orbe (1991), p.58. Trigg (1983), p.96 makes a similar remark.

*subsistentem, nescio si iam ultra evagari sensus noster debeat ad suspicandum, ne forte ipsa hypostasis (id est substantia) eius corporeum habeat . . .*<sup>163</sup>

Similarly, at *de Principiis* 1.2.9, when Origen compares the generation of the Son to a ‘power proceeding from power’ or to an ‘act of will proceeding from the mind’, he immediately qualifies the statement by insisting that the second divine power has its own individual properties (*proprietas*)<sup>164</sup> and is certainly different (*altera*) from the power of God the Father: *vigor ipse in propria subsistentia effectus . . . efficitur ergo virtus altera in sua proprietate subsistens*. Indeed, throughout this passage, Origen insists that the power with which God plans, arranges and controls the universe has processed *ad extra* and does not remain immanent within God the Father. It is a power so immense that it has become a separate power. This paradigm has some interesting similarities with the Apologist doctrine of the procession of the Logos, but the all important difference is that this is an *eternal* procession.<sup>165</sup> Finally, at *de Principiis* 1.3.1, Origen emphasizes the separate and individual existence of the Holy Ghost by referring to the *subsistentia spiritus sancti*.

I believe that all the above remarks are made with the Monarchians firmly in mind. But it is in the *Commentary on St John* that we find the clearest evidence of the development of Origen’s Trinitarian theology as a direct and conscious refutation of Monarchianism.<sup>166</sup>

#### MONARCHIANISM IN THE *COMMENTARY ON ST JOHN*

(5.1)

At *Commentary on St John* 1.24 (23) and 1.38 (42), Origen attacks the Monarchian exegesis of Psalm 45.1: *my heart is indicting a good matter* (ἐξηρεύξατο ἡ καρδία μου λόγον ἀγαθόν). This passage is a fine example of Origen’s exegetical style. He begins by stating the basic belief of his opponents and its implications. He then responds. The style is overtly dialectic and may well reflect real debates at

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<sup>163</sup> These remarks can be usefully compared to the remarks made at *Commentary on St John* 1.34 (39). Here too Origen is keen to pre-empt a Monarchian mis-reading of his Trinitarian doctrine. Having described Christ as the ‘Wisdom of God’, Origen is quick to add that this wisdom is an ἀσώματον ὑπόστασιν. As at *de Principiis* 1.2.2, Origen distinguishes wisdom in man (‘thoughts’) from the Wisdom of God: οὐ γὰρ ἐν ψιλαῖς φαντασίαις τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρός τῶν ὅλων τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἔχει ἡ σοφία αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὰ ἀνάλόγον τοῖς ἀνθρωπίνους ἐννοήμασι φαντάσματα. This passage is referred to by Crouzel (1980), p.133 and briefly discussed.

<sup>164</sup> *proprietas* (ιδιότης) is a crucial term in Origen’s Trinitarian theology. See sections 5.4 and 6.2 for a full discussion.

<sup>165</sup> See section 2.1 for a further discussion of this passage.

<sup>166</sup> Logan (1985), p.427 is correct to point out that Origen’s “real opponents in the *Commentary on St John* (were) Monarchians of various sorts.”

Alexandria.<sup>167</sup> Like Plotinus, Origen leaves his opponents anonymous, describing them simply as *τις* or *τινές*. ‘Some people’, we are told, interpret Psalm 45.1 as implying that the Son is merely a *προφορὰν πατρικὴν*. That is to say, they interpret the *ἐπίνοια* ‘Word’ literally and believe that the Son is simply a word spoken by the Father. Origen ridicules this literalism. As the Son is only figuratively the Vine, the Rod, the Door etc., so he is only figuratively the Word (*Commentary on St. John* 1.24 (23)). David’s words, *My heart is indicting a good matter*, are only a metaphor. Orbe reviews Origen’s life-long dispute with the *simpliciores*, who insist on an anthropomorphic God, as an important background to this passage.<sup>168</sup> Against the *simpliciores*, Origen insists that God neither has a heart nor can he speak (*Commentary on St John* 1.38 (42)).<sup>169</sup>

Moreover, to claim that the Son was literally the ‘word of God’ would imply

1. That he is not an *ὑπόστασις*.
2. That his *οὐσία* is left unexplained. Origen is not concerned at this stage with specifying that the Son is this or that kind (*τοιάνδε ἢ τοιάνδε*) of *οὐσία*, but simply that he is some kind (*ὅπως*).

(οἰόμενοι *προφορὰν πατρικὴν* οἶονεῖ ἐν συλλαβαῖς κειμένην εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο *ὑπόστασιν* αὐτῷ, εἰ ἀκριβῶς αὐτῶν *πυνθανοίμεθα*, οὐ διδάσιν οὐδὲ οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ *σαφηνίζουσιν*, οὐδέπω *φαμέν* *τοιάνδε ἢ τοιάνδε*, ἀλλ’ ὅπως ποτὲ οὐσίαν (*Commentary on St John* 1.24 (23))).

It is clearly the Monarchians who are the object of the present attack, i.e. those who deny that the Son is a separate, individual *οὐσία/ὑπόστασις*.<sup>170</sup> It was a common-place of Monarchian theology to regard the Son as literally God’s spoken word. By this method, they would reduce the Son to a mere *ἐνέργεια* of the Father and deny him eternal and substantial existence: as the words which we speak are insubstantial and ephemeral, so is the Word of God. He is but a temporary means of communication,

<sup>167</sup> For more on this, see Introduction (i) and Chapter 3, section 6.1. Origen’s method is very similar to that of Plotinus; both are ultimately based on Platonic dialectic. Le Boulluec (1985) II, p.440 refers to Origen’s debate with the Gnostic Candidus (Jerome, *Apologia contra Rufinum* 2.19) and notes its similarity to ‘les joutes philosophiques’. Scherer (1960), pp.13-17 refers to Origen’s many ‘entretiens’: the most famous of these is the *Dialogue with Heraclides*, but c.f. also the various debates recorded by Eusebius (*H.E.* 6.33, 6.37, 6.38).

<sup>168</sup> Orbe (1991), pp.60-62.

<sup>169</sup> See Edwards (2000), pp.170-1, who speaks of Origen’s “warning against the facile application of a religious metaphor (and) caution against mistaking Christ for his homonym, our daily medium of communication.” He shows that Clement and Hippolytus issued the same warning.

<sup>170</sup> In this, I agree with Logan (1985), p.425, Wolinski (1995), p.475 and Heine (1993), pp.9-100 and (1998), p.73. Blanc (1966), p.136 and Witt (1933), p.354 argue that it is the Gnostics who are Origen’s anonymous opponents here. This cannot be right. The Gnostic doctrine of the Trinity was founded upon the claim that the Son was the *προβολή* of the Father: this would obviously entail that he was distinct from the Father and that he was a separate *οὐσία* and *ὑπόστασις*. Although Origen strongly

existing only when God speaks to his people.<sup>171</sup> Specifically, Heine tells us that Psalm 45.1 had a well-known tradition of exegesis amongst the Monarchians.<sup>172</sup> Tertullian tells us that Praxeas, perhaps the most famous of the Monarchians, insisted on the literal interpretation of the Word of God. He interpreted David's famous words – *My heart is indicting a good matter* – as Scriptural proof of the insubstantiality of the word of God: *quid est enim – dices – Sermo nisi vox et sonus oris et, sicut grammatici tradunt, 'aer offensus intellegibilis auditu', ceterum vacuum nescio quid et inane et incorporale*. He continues that, if the Son is merely a *vox*, he is not a *substantia*: *non vis enim eum substantivum habere in re per substantiae proprietatem* (*Adversus Praxean* 7). Filastrius makes the same criticism of Paul of Samosata: *prolativum autem, id est quasi aera quendam dicebat non tamen personam vivam Filii sempiternam cum sempiterno Patre credendam docebat* (*Haeres.* 64). Pseudo-Marius Mercator shows that Paul's doctrine was very similar to the anonymous doctrine reported at *Commentary on St John* 1.24 (23), i.e. the doctrine that the Son is merely a προφορικὸν καὶ πατρικὸν λόγον καὶ ἐνεργητικὸν, *id est prolativum et potestatis effectivum verbum sensit, non substantivum, quem Graeci ἐνοῦσιον dicunt* (*Appendix ad contra XII anath.* Nestor 19). Finally, Epiphanius reports that the judges who condemned Paul insisted that the Son be recognized as an οὐσία and not merely a verbal utterance (*Panarion* 73.12).<sup>173</sup>

At *Commentary on St John* 1.24 (23) and 1.38 (42) Origen is objecting to the Monarchian claim that the Son is literally the word of the Father, which implies that he is not an οὐσία and not an ὑπόστασις. As Heine puts it, “The modalist exegesis of Psalm 45.1 treats the term Logos as a category of speech rather than as a category of being.”<sup>174</sup> In response, Origen argues that there are two possible ways of explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son:

1. Either the Son is indistinct from the Father (οὐ κεχωρισμένον), which means that he is not a Son and that he is not an ὑπόστασις.
2. Or the Son is distinct from the Father and is therefore an οὐσία (οὐσιωμένον).

(καὶ λόγον τοιοῦτον καθ' αὐτὸν ζῶντα καὶ ἤτοι οὐ κεχωρισμένον τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο

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objected to the Gnostic doctrine of the Trinity, it is not the object of the present attack. His present worry is almost entirely the opposite.

<sup>171</sup> Orbe (1991), p.55.

<sup>172</sup> Heine (1998), pp.64-66.

<sup>173</sup> The above information, including quotations, is taken from Bardy (1929), pp.366-7, Kelly (1956), pp.118 and 121 and Orbe (1991), pp.55 and 68.

<sup>174</sup> Heine (1998), p.66.

τῷ μὴ ὑφεστάναι οὐδὲ υἷὸν τυγχάνοντα ἢ καὶ κεχωρισμένον καὶ οὐσιωμένον ἀπαγγελλέτωσιν  
ἡμῖν θεὸν λόγον).

Explanation (1) is dismissed as Monarchianism. Against this, Origen insists that the Son is distinct from the Father and that he is therefore an οὐσία and an ὑπόστασις. He is an eternally substantized existence and not merely a temporary, transitory ἐνέργεια.

It is important to note that throughout this passage the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις are used synonymously. As we shall see, this is a pattern repeated throughout the *Commentary on St John*. These are the key phrases in Origen's refutation of Monarchianism. Against the heretical suggestion that the Son is merely an ἐνέργεια of the Father, Origen insists that he is an οὐσία and an ὑπόστασις. I do not believe that there is any important semantic difference between these two terms.<sup>175</sup> In sections 6-7, we discuss the precise meanings of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις and enter the important debate that arises from this controversial issue. For the moment, however, it is sufficient to note that the two words have the same meaning.

(5.2)

At *Commentary on St John* 2.10 (6), Origen again sets up a straw man Monarchian whose ideas he will quickly demolish. As part of a lengthy exegesis of John 1.3 (*All things were made by him*) Origen considers whether the Holy Ghost is one of the 'things' made by the Son. He begins by detailing the three possible explanations for the existence of the Holy Ghost:

1. The Holy Ghost is made (γενητός) by the Son.
2. The Holy Ghost is ἀγέννητος.
3. The Holy Ghost is merely a verbal construct, without its own οὐσία.

In his conclusion, Origen decides that the first explanation is correct. We discuss elsewhere his arguments and their ramifications.<sup>176</sup> For the moment, let us concentrate on Origen's refutation of (3).

Once again, his opponents are anonymous, but we can easily identify them as Monarchians:

ἔσται δέ τις καὶ τρίτος παρὰ τοὺς δύο, τὸν τε διὰ τοῦ λόγου παραδεχόμενον τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον γεγενῆσθαι καὶ τὸν ἀγέννητον αὐτὸ εἶναι ὑπολαμβάνοντα, δογματίζων μηδὲ οὐσίαν τινὰ ἰδίαν ὑφεστάναι τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἑτέραν παρὰ τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν.

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<sup>175</sup> Hanson (1985), p.201 agrees that the two 'are virtually synonymous'. Edwards (2002), p.67 argues, *à propos* this particular passage, that the two are 'nearly coterminous in meaning'. Hammerstaedt (1991), p.20 concludes his article with the firm assurance that οὐσία and ὑπόστασις are interchangeable synonyms.

<sup>176</sup> See section 8.2 and 9.2.

According to this report, the Monarchians deny the Holy Ghost an individual οὐσία that is different from the οὐσία of the Father and the οὐσία of the Son. In response, Origen begins by drawing attention to the Saviour's warning that a sin against the Holy Ghost is unforgivable, while a sin against the Son will be forgiven (Matthew 12.32). The Holy Ghost must therefore be different from the Son (ὁμολογουμένως διαιρέσεως δηλουμένης τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος παρὰ τὸν υἱόν). Origen then reaches the famous conclusion that there are τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις in the Trinity. Once again, we see that οὐσία and ὑπόστασις are used as synonyms<sup>177</sup> and once again they are the key phases in the refutation of Monarchianism.<sup>178</sup> Against the heretics, Origen must show that the Holy Ghost is not simply a convenient label used to describe a particular mode of operation, but an individual οὐσία and an individual ὑπόστασις.

(5.3)

This point is made most clearly at *Commentary on St John* 10.37 (21). Discussing the Resurrection, Origen notices a discrepancy between Christ's challenge to the money-lenders – *Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up* (John 2.10) – and Paul's claim that it was God who raised up Christ (1 Cor. 15.15). Seeking to explain this discrepancy, Origen admits that it is tempting to identify the Father and the Son and to claim that

1. They are not numerically distinct (μὴ διαφέρειν τῷ ἀριθμῷ).<sup>179</sup>
2. They are one οὐσία.
3. They are one ὑποκείμενον.<sup>180</sup>
4. They are different only in ἐπίνοια.
5. They are not Father and Son κατὰ ὑπόστασιν.

This is a neat summary of Monarchian theology.<sup>181</sup> Origen's Monarchian opponents believe that the Father and Son were merely verbally distinct (4), not numerically (1) nor substantially (2), (3), (5). The

<sup>177</sup> *contra* Orbe (1991), p.49, à propos this particular passage.

<sup>178</sup> We agree with Logan (1985), p.425 that Origen's doctrine of the three hypostases is deliberately aimed at the Monarchians.

<sup>179</sup> As we showed above (section 4.1), this was the recognized short-hand for Monarchianism.

<sup>180</sup> In the Patristic period, the term ὑποκείμενον appears to be coterminous with the term οὐσία (so Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*). I cannot accept the argument of Orbe (1991), p.47 that ὑποκείμενον means οὐσία + ποιότης. Origen often uses the term ὑποκείμενον in a polemical context, to distinguish the Father and the Son: *On Prayer* 10.37 and 15.1 and *Commentary on St Matthew* 17.14.

<sup>181</sup> Orbe (1991), p.45-46, Heine (1998), p.89 and Wolinski (1995), p.475 point out that the ambiguity of the Resurrection (did Christ resurrect himself or was he resurrected by the Father?) was a stock argument of Monarchian theology. See, for example, Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum* 3.2 and *Refutatio* frag 2 for the same argument as that used by Origen's anonymous opponents in the present passage.

names ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ do not apply to different beings, but merely to the different modes of action of one and the same being. Against this, Origen insists that the Father and the Son are different (ἕτερον εἶναι) from one another. In support of this position, Origen repeats the classic Aristotelian argument that a son must be the son of a father and a father must be the father of a son.<sup>182</sup> The particular problem of the Resurrection is then explained. Although the Son resurrected himself, the power to do this was given to him by the Father. As Christ explained to the Jews: the Son can do nothing by himself (John 5.19).

It is important to note how in this passage Origen juxtaposes οὐσία, ὑποκείμενον and ὑπόστασις with ἐπινόια. In order to understand fully Origen’s argument here, it will be helpful to recall briefly his theory of the ἐπινόιαι of Christ, developed in the first two books of the *Commentary on St John*. As we have seen (section 4.2), Origen defines the various Christological titles as the ἐπινόιαι of Christ. A crucial point in the discussion is that an ἐπινόια is a merely *verbal* distinction. Despite such a variety of titles, Origen reassures his readers that Christ remains one, undivided οὐσία: μηδεις δὲ προσκοπέτω διακρινόντων ἡμῶν τὰς ἐν τῷ σωτῆρι ἐπινοίας, οἰόμενος καὶ τῇ οὐσίᾳ ταῦτόν ἡμᾶς ποιεῖν (*Commentary on St John* 1.28 (30)).<sup>183</sup> As Stead points out, the ἐπινόιαι are entirely subjective human constructions, the inevitable reflection of our tendency to divide the indivisible and to compartmentalize the unitary. Despite this plurality of names, it is crucial to remember that the Son is ‘perfectly one and simple.’<sup>184</sup> So if the Monarchians claim that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are different only in ἐπινόια, they are claiming that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are one, undivided οὐσία which manifests itself in a variety of different ways and hence – for our convenience – is given a variety (Trinity) of names. As we saw in section 4.1, this was the central tenet of Monarchian theology: the only distinction allowed in God is a subjective, onomastic distinction.

In a very useful essay on the meaning of ὑπόστασις in Greek philosophy until Plotinus, Witt provides the Stoic background to this passage.<sup>185</sup> Beginning with Posidonius, the distinction between

<sup>182</sup> Aristotle, *Categories* 7.19, 7b18. The argument is also used at *de Principiis* 1.2.10.

<sup>183</sup> See also *Commentary on St John* fragment 1, line 64. In this passage, Origen similarly argues that the titles ‘Logos’ and ‘Sophia’ are mere verbal distinctions. The οὐσία of the Son remains one and undivided: οὐχ ἕτερον ὄντα αὐτῆς κατ’ οὐσίαν ἀλλ’ ἐπινοία καὶ σχέσει. Wolinski (1995), pp.482-3 draws attention to *Homilies on Jeremiah* 8.2, where Origen again argues that one ὑποκείμενον can reveal itself under a plurality of ἐπινοίαι: ‘ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ὑποκείμενον ἓν ἐστίν, ταῖς δὲ ἐπινοίαις τὰ πολλὰ ὀνόματα ἐπὶ διαφορῶν ἐστίν.

<sup>184</sup> Stead (1984), pp.142 and 278. See also Orbe (1991), p.44, Crouzel (1980), p.131, Wolinski (1995), pp.482-3 and Harl (1958), p.234.

<sup>185</sup> Witt (1933). Stead (1984), p.142 also notes the Stoic provenance of Origen’s doctrine of the ἐπινόιαι.

κατὰ ὑπόστασιν ('objective reality') and κατ' ἐπίνοιαν ('purely mind-dependent existence') quickly became a philosophical common-place. Posidonius categorizes rainbows, for example, as κατ' ἐπίνοιαν, insofar as they do not have an objective reality, but are illusions which exist only in the mind.<sup>186</sup> Philo and Alexander of Aphrodisias regularly make use of this distinction.<sup>187</sup> In this passage from the *Commentary on St John*, Origen is making direct use of technical Stoic terminology to explain his doctrine of the Trinity. For him, as for the Stoics, the term ἐπίνοια signified a purely mental construction, without a corresponding objective reality.<sup>188</sup>

Origen's use of the term ἐπίνοια is exactly paralleled in the works of his slightly younger contemporary, Plotinus. Logan<sup>189</sup> draws attention to an important passage from the *Enneads* in which the Gnostics are attacked for claiming that the hypostases are distinct only in ἐπίνοια and are therefore not hypostases at all: 'ἀλλ' εἰ ἐπινοίᾳ φήσουσι . . . τῶν πλειόνων ὑποστάσεων ἀποστήσονται (*Ennead* 2.9.1). This is exactly Origen's criticism of the Monarchians: if Father, Son and Holy Ghost are distinct only in ἐπίνοια, they cannot be hypostases. Conversely, throughout the *Enneads*, Plotinus shows how one and the same nature (called variously οὐσία, φύσις, ὑπόστασις) can be distinguished according to ἐπίνοια without disrupting its essential unity.<sup>190</sup> This is exactly Origen's doctrine of the Son. For both Plotinus and Origen, an ἐπίνοια is merely a verbal or mental distinction, a convenient onomastic formula by which the human mind seeks to distinguish the various activities or operations of one and the same indivisible nature. To claim that the Father and Son are different *only* in ἐπίνοια is the Monarchian heresy. Against this, Origen insists that there are three οὐσίαι in the Trinity.<sup>191</sup>

(5.4)

<sup>186</sup> Witt (1933), p.325. See Posidonius, fragments 16 and 92 (Edelstein-Kidd).

<sup>187</sup> Witt (1933), pp.328 and 330.

<sup>188</sup> I cannot agree with Grillmeier (1965), p.164 when he writes that 'the *epinoia* is typical of Origen in so far as it has a subjective and an objective side. It is 'title', 'expression' at the same time as it is objective reality.' Surely the main point about the doctrine of the ἐπίνοια is that there is *no* corresponding objective reality. The various divine titles are simply a reflection of our human way of understanding and of describing the nature of Christ.

<sup>189</sup> Logan (1985), p.425.

<sup>190</sup> *Ennead* 5.9.5.11, 6.2.3.23, 6.2.7.19, 6.2.13.38, 6.6.9.13-14, 6.8.7.26. It is also interesting to compare Apuleius, *de Mundo* 370, where we are reminded that, although he has a multiplicity of titles, God remains 'one': *et cum sit unus, pluribus nominibus cietur, specierum multitudine, quarum diversitate fit multiformis vis*. The origin of Apuleius' argument here is pseudo-Aristotle's *de Mundo*, a text with which Origen would most likely have been familiar.

<sup>191</sup> c.f. *Commentary on St Matthew* 17.14, where Origen similarly attacks those who believe that the Father and Son are one ὑπόστασις and one ὑποκείμενον, different only in ἐπίνοια: οἱ συγγέοντες πατρός καὶ υἱοῦ ἔννοιαν καὶ τῇ ὑποστάσει ἓνα διδόντες εἶναι τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν, τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ μόνῃ καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασι διαιροῦντες τὸ ἓν ὑποκείμενον.



The reader is also referred to Origen's discussion of the Holy Ghost preserved in fragment 37 of the *Commentary on St John*. The discussion forms part of an exegesis of the famous verse from the fourth Gospel: *the wind blows where it wills* (John 3.8). The Monarchians interpreted this verse as implying that the Spirit is simply an ἐνέργεια of God. The term ἐνέργεια (Latin, *inoperatio*) was a technical term of Monarchian theology, which would have been instantly recognized by Origen's erudite and wary readers. It was used by the Monarchians to describe the different 'modes of operation' performed by God.<sup>192</sup> In this passage, the Monarchians are accused of reducing the status of the Holy Ghost to that of a mere ἐνέργεια, the manifestation of a particular kind of power. In response to this economic modalism, Origen insists that the Holy Ghost is a separate οὐσία with individual properties of existence (ὑπάρξεως ιδιότητα). As an active force operating in the world, the Holy Ghost must be seen as an οὐσία ενεργητική and not simply an ἐνέργεια:

σημαίνει δὲ τοῦτο καὶ οὐσίαν εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα. οὐ γάρ, ὥς τινες οἴονται, ἐνέργειά ἐστι θεοῦ, οὐκ ἔχον κατ' αὐτοὺς ὑπάρξεως ιδιότητα . . . εἰ δὲ θέλει καὶ ἐνεργεῖ καὶ διαιρεῖ, οὐσία γοῦν ἐστὶν ενεργητική, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐνέργεια (*Commentary on St John*, frag. 37.5).<sup>193</sup>

The arguments of this passage can be usefully compared to the brief critique of Monarchianism at *Commentary on St John* 2.2.<sup>194</sup> In this earlier passage, Origen similarly objects to the way in which the Monarchians deny the Son an individual οὐσία and therefore also deny him his own ιδιότης: ἀρνούμενους ιδιότητα υἱοῦ ἑτέραν παρὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ὁμολογοῦντας θεὸν εἶναι τὸν μέχρι ὀνόματος παρ' αὐτοῖς "υἱὸν" προσαγορευόμενον.<sup>195</sup>

The term ιδιότης is central to Origen's definition of οὐσία.<sup>196</sup> He believes that each οὐσία displays its own unique ιδιότης, i.e. peculiar distinguishing properties. οὐσία X is distinct from οὐσία Y precisely because, and only because, it possesses a distinct ιδιότης. This argument is most fully developed at *Commentary on St John* 20.24 (20), where Origen argues that gold, lead and wax are different οὐσίαι because they possess different ιδιότης. Conversely, the rational souls are ὁμοούσιος (the same οὐσία)

<sup>192</sup> See section 4.1 for a discussion of this important aspect of Monarchian theology.

<sup>193</sup> See also *Commentary on St John* fragment 123.5. Commenting on the same verse, Origen attacks the same opponents for the same reason: τινὲς γὰρ οἴονται ἐνέργειαν εἶναι θεοῦ, μὴ ἔχον ἰδίαν ὑπόστασιν.

<sup>194</sup> We discuss this important passage in section 9.2.

<sup>195</sup> c.f. *de Principiis* 1.2.9 (discussed in section 4.2), where Origen similarly argues that the Son, although a 'power' (*virtus*) nevertheless exists in *sua proprietate* (*proprietas* = ιδιότης).

<sup>196</sup> So, too, Orbe (1991), p.43, who speaks of "la correlación necesaria entre *ousia* et *idiotes* . . . una *ousia*, una *idiotes*."

because they possess the same *ιδιότης*.<sup>197</sup> Let it be carefully noted that, according to Origen's definition, the term *ιδιότης* does not refer to personal qualities that distinguish particular individuals, but to generic characteristics shared by and common to a particular group or species. I do not agree with Orbe who interprets *ιδιότης* 'como distintivo o propiedad personal'.<sup>198</sup> For Origen, the term *ιδιότης* signifies a generic and not a personal distinction.<sup>199</sup> This point has important ramifications for our assessment of Origen's doctrine of the Trinity. When Origen claims that the Holy Ghost exhibits its own unique *ιδιότης*, he is concerned with much more than a mere 'personal' distinction.

In fragment 37 and in chapter 2.2 of the *Commentary on St John* Origen explicitly attacks the Monarchian theory that there is only one *οὐσία* and therefore only one *ιδιότης* in the Trinity.<sup>200</sup> Against this, Origen insists that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three separate and individual *οὐσίαι*, each with its own unique *ιδιότης*. Origen will not accept that the persons of the Trinity are simply different modes of operation and that the distinction between them is simply a convenient onomastic formula used to describe the various different rôles assumed at various different times. We have already seen and discussed in detail how Origen insists that each member of the Trinity has its own particular sphere of influence and its own particular tasks to perform.<sup>201</sup> But the distinction between the Father, Son and Holy Ghost must not be restricted to such economic criteria. Lyman has missed the point when she compares Origen's Trinity to the Stoic doctrine of 'individuation within shared being; the different activity (producing) a distinct, if essentially related individual.'<sup>202</sup> It is not simply the fact that they perform different tasks that distinguishes the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. This is Monarchianism. It is precisely against this that Origen insists that the three are individual and separate *οὐσίαι*, not simply *ἐνέργειαι*.

(5.5)

Another passage from the *Commentary on St John* provides us with our final piece of evidence that Origen's Trinitarian theology was built upon the refutation of Monarchianism. Commenting on St

<sup>197</sup> We discuss this important passage in detail in section 6.2.

<sup>198</sup> Orbe (1991), p. 42.

<sup>199</sup> It would appear that Origen is following the original Aristotelian definition of this term. At *Topics* 102a18, Aristotle defines *ιδιότης* as a property which defines a species: for example, the ability to learn grammar is *ἰδιον* to man, but to no other species. On this point, see Urmson (1990).

<sup>200</sup> See Orbe (1991), p.42: "según los "monarquianos" no hay *idiotes* que distinga personalmente al Hijo de la *idiotes* del Padre. Se adivina la razón: porque toda *idiotes* responde, como propiedad física, a una substancia (= *ousia*). Y por tanto, donde hay una sola substancia – la *ousia* divina – ha de haber necesariamente una sola *idiotes*."

<sup>201</sup> Section 3.

<sup>202</sup> Lyman (1993), p.72.

John's identification of the Logos as 'the light shining in the darkness' (John 1.4-9), Origen points out that the Father is also called light (e.g. at 1 John 1.5). Noticing the common metaphor, people are wont to conclude that the Father and the Son are not different in οὐσία: τῇ οὐσίᾳ μὴ διεστηκέναι τοῦ υἱοῦ τὸν πατέρα (*Commentary on St John* 2.23 (18)). For Origen this is a careless exegesis.<sup>203</sup> The meticulous scholar will conclude that the Father and Son are not the same (οὐ ταὐτόν). The light that 'shines in the darkness' is different from the light in which there is no darkness at all. The Father and the Son are numerically distinct and are to be identified as the 'two lights' of Psalm 36.10.

Huet, the great 17<sup>th</sup> century apologist for Origen, is quick to remove any negative implications from the above claims. He argues that Origen believed the Father and the Son to be 'of the same substance' (*Patrem eiusdem esse substantiae ac Filium*).<sup>204</sup> The distinction between the two can only therefore refer to the difference between the Incarnated Christ and his Father. But although Origen does refer to the Incarnation and does interpret the 'light shining in the darkness' as a reference to Christ's earthly mission, he is also keen to stress the difference between the Father and the Son before the Incarnation.<sup>205</sup> Moreover, in this passage, Origen is not concerned with numerical distinction *tout court*, with the basic refutation of Monarchianism by claiming that the Father and the Son are two (οὐσίαι) and not one.<sup>206</sup> Origen goes much further than this. Basing himself on the traditional Platonic dogma that that which produces is necessarily greater than that which is produced,<sup>207</sup> Origen thoroughly subordinates the Son to the Father. The distinction between the two is the inevitable consequence of complete causal dependence: ὃ δὲ λόγῳ ὁ πατὴρ τῆς ἀληθείας θεὸς πλείων ἐστὶ καὶ μείζων ἢ ἀλήθεια καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὧν σοφίας κρείττων ἐστὶ καὶ διαφέρων ἢ σοφία, τούτῳ ὑπερέχει τοῦ εἶναι φῶς ἀληθινόν.<sup>208</sup> It is not simply the Incarnation which distinguishes the Son from the Father. It is the basic fact that the latter produces/causes the former that makes the Father

<sup>203</sup> Hanson (1988), pp.66-7 and (1985), p.412 has made the mistake of attributing this view to Origen himself.

<sup>204</sup> Huet, *Origeniana*, quoted in P.G. 14, 154 not. We discuss the crucial topic of consubstantiality in chapter 2.

<sup>205</sup> Orbe (1991), p.44 has also restricted the difference between the Father and the Son to the fact of the Incarnation. Like Huet, he has not paid sufficient attention to how the argument develops.

<sup>206</sup> This is a crucial point which will form the backbone of the remainder of this chapter.

<sup>207</sup> See Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.1.6 and 5.3.15.

<sup>208</sup> Dillon (1992), pp.17-18 provides a brief discussion of this passage. He argues that it is "a most interesting use of an old Platonist principle" that God is above being because he is the cause of being (*Rep.* 6.505B). In this passage, Origen argues that the Father is 'above' light because he is the father of light.

πλείων, μείζων and κρείττων. It is for this reason that the Father is different from (διαφέρων) the Son and surpasses (ὑπερέχει) him.

(5.6)

We can conclude therefore that it was Origen's conflict with the Monarchians that formed the foundation of much of his Trinitarian doctrine. It was in response to the Monarchian theory of economic modalism that Origen proclaimed the eternally distinct existence of Father, Son and Holy Ghost as three separate and individual οὐσίαι/ὑποστάσεις. The names of the three persons of the Trinity refer to real, distinct beings and are not simply convenient labels (ἐπίνοιαί) describing different modes of action (ἐνέργειαι). Although the Son is certainly to be identified with the essential divine attributes of wisdom, will and power, these must not be understood merely as attributes of the Father, but as eternally substantized and hypostasized in a separate individual being. And although the Holy Ghost has his own particular sphere of influence and his own particular tasks to perform, his distinction from the Father and the Son is not restricted to such economic criteria: like the Son, he is an eternally existing individual οὐσία. But further discussion and further clarification is needed. In particular, we must ask what Origen means by the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. When he claims that the Father and the Son are different in οὐσία and that there are τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις in the Trinity, does he mean anything more than a mere numerical distinction, the basic refutation of Monarchianism by claiming that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three οὐσίαι/ὑποστάσεις and not one? A very great deal hinges upon the precise meaning, in Origen's oeuvre, of these notoriously ambiguous and slippery terms. We begin with an analysis of the term οὐσία.

#### THE MEANING OF οὐσία

(6.1)

Various scholars have attempted to explain and excuse Origen's Trinitarian doctrine by claiming that when he employs the term οὐσία he means simply 'an individual existent', the equivalent of 'person' in the orthodox Trinitarian terminology of the next century.<sup>209</sup> That is to say, Origen's assertion that there are three οὐσίαι in the Trinity and that these three οὐσίαι are different and distinct from one another is nothing more than a swipe at the Monarchians, nothing more than the bald assertion of numerical distinction. Stevenson explicitly claims that "Origen uses οὐσία to mean 'person'. This usage serves to

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<sup>209</sup> Bethune-Baker (1901), pp.77-78 and (1933), pp.149; Hanson (1985), p.201; Jay (1954), pp.126-7 and Wolfson (1956), p.318.

distinguish the divine persons and avoid Sabellianism.”<sup>210</sup> Wolfson and Jay support this argument by pointing out that the use of οὐσία to mean ‘individual existent’ was sanctioned by Aristotle himself in the *Categories*. At *Categories* 2a11, Aristotle distinguishes primary οὐσία - that which makes an individual different from everyone/everything else, that which makes Socrates Socrates – and secondary οὐσία – that which makes Socrates a man and not a dog.<sup>211</sup> It would certainly be legitimate for Origen, working within a conventional philosophical framework, to use the word οὐσία to mean an individual existent, an individual example of a particular species. Plotinus, writing at roughly the same time, discusses in great detail the πρώτη οὐσία of Socrates (*Ennead* 6.3.9). The Aristotelian distinction between secondary and primary οὐσία was also familiar to Christian writers. Hippolytus, for example, discusses the topic at *Refutatio* 7.6. If Origen does indeed mean primary οὐσία when he claims that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are different in οὐσία and that there are three distinct, separate and individual οὐσίαι in the Trinity, the apologetic advantages are obvious. The defenders of Origen can proclaim his doctrinal orthodoxy, *avant l’heure*, and hail him as a precocious precursor of Nicaea. They would argue that, in Origen’s theological system, the οὐσία of the Son is simply an individual example or instance of the generic οὐσία of divinity, an οὐσία shared equally by Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Richard Hanson, a tireless campaigner for the rehabilitation of Origen, agrees with Jay and Wolfson that Origen ‘seldom or never uses οὐσία to mean essence or substance’, but almost always in the sense of primary οὐσία.<sup>212</sup> The claim that the Father and the Son are different in οὐσία must therefore be interpreted in a simple numerical sense, allowing that ‘the distinct persons share the same nature.’<sup>213</sup> Hanson and his allies follow the well-trodden scholarly path of lamenting the poverty of the Greek language at this date as hampering the development of Trinitarian theology in the Eastern Church.<sup>214</sup> The lack of a Greek equivalent to the Latin term *persona* led to an unfortunate confusion. The modern-day Apologist for Origen argues that he wholeheartedly agreed with his Latin *confrères* that the Trinity comprised three persons and one substance, but that he lacked the necessary technical vocabulary to

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<sup>210</sup> Stevenson (1927), p.84.

<sup>211</sup> For a discussion of Aristotle’s theory of primary and secondary οὐσία, see Stead (1977), pp.57-62. Edwards (2002), p.65 defines ‘primary οὐσία’ as a ‘concrete individual’ and ‘secondary οὐσία’ as a ‘natural kind or species.’

<sup>212</sup> Hanson (1985), p.201.

<sup>213</sup> Hanson (1988), p.65.

express himself. Without being able to use the term *πρόσωπον*, Origen was obliged to make do with *οὐσία* to express the concept of a divine ‘person’.<sup>215</sup>

It seems to me however that there are two main problems with this argument. First and foremost, a careful reading of Origen’s oeuvre will reveal that he always uses the term *οὐσία* to mean ‘substance’ or ‘nature’.<sup>216</sup> He has no use for the Aristotelian concept of primary *οὐσία*. So to claim that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are different in *οὐσία* must mean that they are different in nature or substance and not simply numerically distinct.<sup>217</sup> Second, Origen’s Trinitarian theology is characterized by an obvious and thorough subordinationism. We have already seen that at *Commentary on St John* 2.23 (18), Origen explains or justifies the claim that the Father and the Son are different *κατ’ οὐσίαν*, by describing a strictly hierarchical Trinity in which the Father is ‘fuller’, ‘mightier’ and ‘greater’ than the Son. This is a model repeated throughout Origen’s oeuvre. I cannot therefore accept the conclusions of Hanson and the others that Origen was a fully orthodox Trinitarian, *avant l’heure*. We shall soon see that Origen’s Trinitarian theology is in fact entirely different from that proposed at Nicaea. Even if Origen had been aware of a Greek equivalent to the Latin term *persona*, he would not have wanted to use it. For him, the distinction between the Father, Son and Holy Ghost is not simply a numerical distinction, a distinction of ‘persons’, but something much more fundamental.<sup>218</sup>

(6.2)

We have shown that Origen’s refutation of Monarchianism depends upon the assertion that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three distinct and individual *οὐσίαι*, eternally different from one another. In order to understand the full meaning of these claims, we must understand in as much detail as possible

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<sup>214</sup> It is a common-place of Patristic scholarship that the Romans, under the able leadership of Tertullian, were the first to develop the ‘one substance, three persons’ formula. See chapter 2, sections 7.1-7.3 for a full discussion of this topic.

<sup>215</sup> The use of the term *πρόσωπον* to mean a ‘person’ did not become current until the Arian Controversy. In previous years, the term had been scrupulously avoided as being uncomfortably close to the Monarchian concept of God assuming different guises. Indeed, the term originally meant a theatrical mask. Bethune-Baker (1933), pp.73-74 discusses the use of the term *πρόσωπον* by Sabellius *et al* and its consequent defilement for ‘orthodox’ theologians. Origen never uses the term in a Trinitarian context. It is true that Hippolytus, writing against Noetus, uses the term but he is something of a maverick in the Eastern Church.

<sup>216</sup> I assume that ‘nature’ and ‘substance’ are synonyms. Although Aristotle distinguished the two, the difference does not appear to have had any relevance for Origen.

<sup>217</sup> We discuss this first point in sections 6.2-6.3. In sections 7.1-7.3, we discuss the precise meaning of the term *ὑπόστασις* in Origen’s oeuvre and reach a similar conclusion.

<sup>218</sup> We discuss this second point in sections 9.1-12.1.

the technical vocabulary involved.<sup>219</sup> Scholarly discussions of Origen's Trinitarian theology, in particular his use of the term οὐσία, seem to me to have been focussed far too narrowly. In claiming that Origen uses οὐσία to mean individual existent or individual example, the equivalent of 'person', scholars have restricted themselves to examining the uses of the term in Trinitarian contexts. I feel however that any full enquiry into the meaning of οὐσία must take into consideration the uses of the term in every context. I do not believe that Origen had a peculiar or specific meaning in mind when he spoke of the οὐσία of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost that was different from what he had in mind when he spoke, for example, of the οὐσία of rational souls or the οὐσία of lead, silver and gold. An examination of the use and meaning of οὐσία throughout Origen's oeuvre is thus the fundamental first stage in understanding his Trinitarian theology, in which the term plays such a central rôle.

The most useful evidence in this quest comes from book 20 of the *Commentary on St John*, in which Origen repeatedly uses the term οὐσία in the course of his famous attack on the Gnostic theory of soul natures. One of Origen's major quarrels with the Gnostics is (what he sees as) their deterministic theory. This is the belief that there are two soul natures, the pneumatic and the choic. The pneumatics are pre-determined to virtue and salvation, while the choics are pre-determined to sin and damnation.<sup>220</sup> For Christian Gnostics, the Gospel of John became something of a proof text, since there were a number of famous verses which appeared to endorse this particular brand of determinism. Origen has preserved for us large portions of a commentary on the fourth Gospel written by the Valentinian, Heracleon.<sup>221</sup> Heracleon's exegesis is often the starting point for Origen's own comments.

Book 20 of the *Commentary on St John* deals in detail with Heracleon's exegesis of Christ's words to the Jews – *Why do you not understand my speech? Because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the devil* (John 8.44). In Heracleon's exegesis of this passage, he argues that the 'Jews' addressed by Christ are the choics: by very nature, they are unable to hear the message of salvation. What is particularly important to the present enquiry is the fact that in both the quotations from Heracleon and Origen's response, the term for a soul nature is either οὐσία or φύσις. The two are taken as synonyms and are used interchangeably.

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<sup>219</sup> It is of course far beyond the scope of the present study to provide a history of the various different meanings of the term οὐσία in Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. It is also unnecessary: although Origen was undoubtedly influenced by previous uses of the term, he has his own peculiar gloss. Stead (1977) provides an exhaustive analysis of the uses of the term throughout antiquity.

<sup>220</sup> Origen is perhaps not entirely fair to the Gnostics. A third group, the psychics, who are free to choose their own destiny, are very rarely mentioned. It obviously suits Origen's polemical purpose to concentrate on the pneumatics and the choics. On this point, see Dihle (1982), pp.150-57.

The Gnostics, we are told, hold a ‘doctrine of natures’ (συνίστασθαι τὸν περὶ φύσεως λόγον; οἱ τὰς φύσεις εἰσάγοντες; τῶν τὰς φύσεις εἰσαγόντων; οἱ τὴν περὶ διαφορῶν φύσεων εἰσάγοντες μυθοποιῖαν).<sup>222</sup> They believe that the choics have a peculiar ‘nature’ (φύσις) and that they are unable to understand Christ’s words because of their ‘incurable nature’ (διὰ φύσιν ἀνιάτως ἔχουσιν); they are the children of the devil ‘by nature’ (τοὺς φύσει τοῦ διαβόλου υἱούς). Conversely, the Gnostics believe that certain men are sons of God ‘by nature and by constitution’ (φύσει καὶ ἐκ πρώτης κατασκευῆς); they share the ‘blessed nature’ (μακαρίας φύσεως) of the Saviour and for this reason are able to hear his word. In the above quotations, the term used for a soul nature is φύσις. Yet there are many passages in which Origen uses the term οὐσία to describe a soul nature. For example, we are told that Heracleon believes the choics to be of the same οὐσία as the devil (ὁμοούσιος τῷ διαβόλῳ), which is different from the οὐσία of the pneumatics and the psychics:

ἐτέρας οὐσίας τυγχάνοντας παρ’ οὗς καλοῦσι ψυχικοὺς ἢ πνευματικοὺς; διαβόλου οὐσίας παρὰ τὴν τῶν ἄλλων λογικῶν οὐσίαν.

The choics are repeatedly described as ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ διαβόλου. Against the Gnostics, Origen assures his readers that we become children of the devil by our deeds and not as the result of our οὐσία or κατασκευῇ; we become ‘lying spirits’ because of sin and deceit and not because of our οὐσία. In fine, we are told that it is ‘absurd’ (παράλογον) to think that souls could be different οὐσῖαι from one another (ἐτέρας καὶ ἐτέρας οὐσίας).

In his famous refutation of determinism at *Commentary on St John* 20.23 (20), Origen uses the term οὐσία to describe a soul nature:

πολλάκις δὲ εἶπομεν, ὅτι εἰάν συγχωρηθῇ τοῦτο τὸ ἀδύνατον (λέγω δὲ τὸ εἶναι οὐσίας ἐτέρας καὶ ἀνεπίδεκτον τῶν κρειττόνων τὸν διάβολον), περὶ μὲν ἐκείνου ἀπολογησόμεθα ὥς οὐδαμοῦ αἰτίου τῆς πονηρίας, τὸ δὲ ἔγκλημα τῷ αὐτὸν οὐσιώσαντι καὶ δημιουργήσαντι προσάψομεν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ πάντων ἀτοπώτατον. In chapter 20.28 (22), Origen employs exactly the same argument, but uses the term φύσις in place of οὐσία. Heracleon believes that the devil is unable to *abide in truth* (John 8.44) because of his ‘nature’: ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως ἴδιον ἔχων τὸ ψεῦδος, φυσικῶς μὴ δυνάμενός ποτε

<sup>221</sup> See Brooke (1891), pp.41-7 for a summary of Heracleon’s theology.

<sup>222</sup> c.f. *Commentary on St John* 28.21 (16) for the same description of the Gnostic determinists: οἱ τὰς φύσεις εἰσάγοντες; κατὰ τοὺς εἰσάγοντας τὰς φύσεις.



ἀλήθειαν εἰπεῖν. Origen replies that if this were the case, the devil would be completely exonerated: he would be unlucky rather than guilty.

From this brief overview, it is clear that Origen uses the terms οὐσία and φύσις as synonyms. They are employed absolutely interchangeably to describe a group of souls who share the same characteristics. We can conclude therefore, *contra* Bethune-Baker, Hanson, Jay and Wolfson, that Origen uses the term οὐσία in a generic sense. It means ‘nature’, Aristotle’s ‘secondary οὐσία’. This conclusion has very important ramifications for our understanding of Origen’s Trinitarian theology. When he argues that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are separate, distinct and individual οὐσίαι, Origen must mean that they are separate, distinct and individual *natures*.

Against the Gnostic theory that there are different kinds of soul, Origen insists that all souls are ὁμοούσιος, i.e. of the same nature or the same substance. This is glossed as meaning that they share the same ιδιότης.<sup>223</sup> Specifically, Origen points out that every rational soul exhibits the same mental abilities of memory, thought, imagination and – most importantly – the same capacity for moral choice. Origen cannot accept the Gnostic argument that souls of a different οὐσία could share the same psychological attributes. He uses an analogy to illustrate the point. The reader is invited to imagine three statues of the same shape, cast from the same mould, but made from a different material (οὐσία) – lead, wax and gold. Obviously the three statues would display different individual properties (ιδιότης). The same applies to human souls: were they different in οὐσία, they too would display different properties. The fact that everyone is able to remember, think, imagine and make moral choices proves that their souls are ὁμοούσιος.

Origen anticipates a possible objection to his argument: how will he explain the fact that some men have a better memory or a better imagination than others, that some men are virtuous, while others are sinners? Origen will not admit that this proves that there are different soul natures (οὐσίαι). As a diseased eye is ὁμοούσιος with a healthy eye, so the soul of the devil is ὁμοούσιος with the souls of the saints and angels. A disease of the eye, like the corruption of the devil, is merely an accident supervening upon the substance. As such, it can always be reversed. As a diseased eye can be cured, so the devil can repent. This is an interesting Christianization of a classic Aristotelian tenet. Aristotle repeatedly distinguishes the accidental from the essential. The accidental can be altered, even reversed, without affecting the substance in any way: fat men can become thin and still remain men. Origen

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<sup>223</sup> See section 5.4 for a discussion of the crucial term ιδιότης.

adopts this famous maxim as part of his lengthy refutation of Gnostic determinism. Sin, he argues, is not the reflection of an irreparably lost nature, but is merely a temporary and curable state (*Commentary on St John* 20.23 (20)).

The claims in this passage recall a similar argument used in the conclusion of the *de Principiis*. At *de Principiis* 4.4.9, Origen asserts that all the rational souls are *unius naturae* and *unius substantiae*, because they all share the same ability to participate in intellectual light.<sup>224</sup> Likewise, all eyes are of the same substance, because they all share the same ability to receive light and all ears are of the same substance, because they all share the same ability to receive sound. Origen then makes a comparison between (a) men who are nearly blind and men who see perfectly and (b) men who are sinners and men who are saints. The crux of the argument is that the same nature can be healthy, well developed and well used or neglected, impaired and diseased. This is very similar to the arguments of *Commentary on St John* 20.23 (20). Once again, Origen's main aim is to refute the claim that the unequal spiritual or mental development of different men is the result of different soul-natures.

Having examined the various uses of the term οὐσία /*substantia* in the *Commentary on St John* and the *de Principiis*, it becomes extremely hard to accept the conclusion of Richard Hanson that 'Origen seldom or never uses *ousia* to mean essence or substance.'<sup>225</sup> It seems to me that this is precisely what the term *does* mean. For Origen, οὐσία/*substantia* is always 'secondary οὐσία', a common nature shared by a group of individuals, each exhibiting the same generic characteristics (ιδιότης). So Origen can speak of the οὐσία of rational souls, meaning a nature common to all rational beings, be they men, stars, angels or devils, who share the same capacities and capabilities. Similarly, he can refer to the οὐσία of wax, common to everything made of wax but entirely different from anything made of lead or gold. Origen has no use for the Aristotelian concept of 'primary οὐσία.' He does not, for example, speak of the οὐσία of an individual soul and claim it to be different from the οὐσία of every other soul.

Whenever Origen uses the term οὐσία, he means generic, 'secondary οὐσία.'<sup>226</sup>

(6.3)

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<sup>224</sup> Note the synonymous use of *natura* and *substantia*, undoubtedly the Latin versions of φύσις and οὐσία. See *de Principiis* 1.5.5 for a similar juxtaposition of these two terms. As part of an attack on Gnostic determinism, Origen again argues that no rational soul is good or evil by nature or by substance: *per hoc ostenditur substantialiter vel naturaliter esse aliquem immaculatum neque substantialiter pollutum*.

<sup>225</sup> Hanson (1985), p.201.

<sup>226</sup> de Riedmatten (1957), p.58 shares this view. In a brief discussion of the use of the term οὐσία in Origen, he makes no reference to 'primary οὐσία' but rightly refers to the οὐσία of angels, daemons

This claim is supported by a very important, but strangely neglected passage in Origen's treatise *On Prayer*. In chapter 27.8 Origen indulges in a scholarly and rather irrelevant excursus on the various possible meanings of οὐσία proposed by the various philosophical schools.<sup>227</sup> The basic debate is the familiar one between the nominalists and the realists: are universals simply the creation of the enquiring mind abstracting common qualities from empirical data, or do they exist in a prior and causative way as the Platonic forms?<sup>228</sup> The relevance of this passage to the present discussion is that, throughout the argument, οὐσία is interpreted in a generic sense. It is surely extremely important that there is no reference to Aristotle's 'primary οὐσία' in such a detailed discussion of the various possible meanings of the term.

A little earlier in this same treatise, Origen makes the famous and much discussed claim that the Son is ἕτερος κατ' οὐσίαν καὶ ὑποκείμενόν from the Father and that prayer should therefore be addressed to the Father alone (*On Prayer* 15).<sup>229</sup> This recalls the various claims in the *Commentary on St John*, discussed above. The correct interpretation of this passage from the treatise *On Prayer* will therefore help immeasurably in our quest to understand the Trinitarian doctrine developed in the *Commentary on St John*. In particular, it will help clarify the precise meaning of the term οὐσία as used in Trinitarian contexts: does it mean 'person' or 'substance'? It is not surprising that this passage has received a great deal of scholarly attention. Bethune-Baker, Hanson, Jay, Wolfson and Bigg all try to rescue Origen from a theological tight spot by arguing that in this passage he is using οὐσία to mean a person, i.e. 'primary οὐσία'.<sup>230</sup> Once again, the apologists for Origen will not accept that he believed the Son to be different *in substance* from the Father. But however convenient it might be, I cannot accept this interpretation. First, this use of the term οὐσία would be at odds with all the various examples quoted above. Our discussions have proved that Origen always uses the term οὐσία to mean 'nature' or 'substance': it is always generic, never individual. The arguments of *On Prayer* 27.8 prove the point definitively. Since there is no mention of Aristotle's 'primary οὐσία' in such a detailed discussion of

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and human souls. He concludes that "οὐσία comme terme technique comporte une référence à la substance existente."

<sup>227</sup> Jay (1954), p.172 believes it to be simply 'a display of erudition'. Stead (1977), p.138 suggests that the information was drawn from a philosophical dictionary.

<sup>228</sup> Jay (1954), pp.172-3 and Stead (1994), pp.164-6.

<sup>229</sup> Trigg (1985), p.160 writes: "Origen believed that offering prayers indiscriminately to God the Father and to Christ implied the heresy that the Father and the Son are identical in substance." While I agree with this basic point, Trigg has failed to take adequate notice of how the argument develops, i.e. how Origen is not concerned with a simple refutation of Monarchianism, but rather with subordinationism.

the various possible meanings of the term, I find it extremely difficult to accept that Origen has ‘primary οὐσία’ in mind, when he claims here – only a few chapters previously – that the Son is different κατ’ οὐσίαν. He must mean that the Son is generically different from the Father, different in nature and substance.

Indeed, the claim that the Son is of a different nature from the Father and not merely a different ‘person’ is fundamental to the argument of *On Prayer* 15. If the Son were merely a different *person*, there would be no reason why prayer should not be offered to him as much as to the Father. By claiming that we must pray to the Father alone – through the Son – Origen is asserting a much more fundamental distinction between the two.<sup>231</sup> The Son is presented in the guise of a Middle-Platonic intermediary, relaying the prayers of men to an untouchable Father.<sup>232</sup>

#### THE MEANING OF ὑπόστασις

(7.1)

Like οὐσία, the term ὑπόστασις is central to Origen’s Trinitarian theory. We have seen how Origen regularly criticizes his Monarchian opponents for failing to distinguish Father, Son and Holy Ghost as τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις.<sup>233</sup> At *Commentary on St John* 1.24 (23) and 1.38 (42), we read that the Monarchians do not give the Son an ὑπόστασις, but identify him as merely the Father’s spoken word. At *Commentary on St John* 10.37, Origen attacks those Christians who distinguish the Father and the Son according to ἐπίνοια but not according to ὑπόστασις. In fragment 123.5 of the *Commentary on St John*, Origen reports that the Monarchians reduce the Holy Ghost to a mere ἐνέργεια of the Father and do not therefore allow him an ἰδίαν ὑπόστασιν. Similarly, at *Commentary on St Matthew* 17.14, Origen attacks those who believe that the Father and the Son are one ὑπόστασις.

In the fragmentary *Commentary on Titus*, Origen again denounces the claim that there is only one ὑπόστασις in the Trinity (P.G. 14 1304D). We find a very similar discussion at *Contra Celsum* 8.12. Having established the divinity of the Son and his union with the Father, Origen turns his attention to those who believe that the Father and Son are different only in ἐπίνοια and who therefore deny that the Father and the Son are δύο ὑποστάσεις. Keen to dispel any hint of Monarchianism, Origen insists that

<sup>230</sup> Bethune-Baker (1901), pp.77-78 and (1933), pp.149; Hanson (1985), p.201; Jay (1954), pp.126-7; Wolfson (1956), p.318; Bigg (1913), p.203.

<sup>231</sup> O’Meara (1954), p.210 is right to interpret this passage as a clear example of ‘Origen’s subordinationism’. Jerome also quotes the passage as proof of Origen’s subordinationism and calls it an *aperta blasphema* (*Epistola* 92.2 and *Epistola* 96.12).

<sup>232</sup> The Son’s rôle as intermediary will be discussed in detail in sections 10.1-12.1.

the union between the Father and the Son is merely a union of will and purpose and that they remain distinct τῇ ὑποστάσει.<sup>234</sup>

At *Commentary on St John* 2.10.6, Origen similarly responds to the Monarchian threat by stating that there are τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις in the Trinity. Origen cannot accept the central modalist creed that the Son and the Holy Ghost are simply aspects or ‘modes’ of divine expression. Although the Son is to be identified with the essential divine attributes of will, power and wisdom, these must be understood as eternally substantized as a separate and individual ὑπόστασις (*Commentary on St John* 1.34 (39), *de Principiis* 1.2.2 and *Commentary on Ephesians* fragment 10).

Witt and Logan discuss the importance of the term ὑπόστασις in the wider Monarchian controversy.<sup>235</sup> The orthodox theologians of the third and fourth century repeat the complaints of Origen: the Monarchians do not allow the Son his own, individual ὑπόστασις. Indeed, Epiphanius cites this as the main grounds for the condemnation of Paul of Samosata at the Council of Ephesus (Epiphanius *Pinarion* 65.1).<sup>236</sup>

(7.2)

It is clear therefore that, together with οὐσία, ὑπόστασις is the key term in Origen’s debate with the Monarchians and the crux of his Trinitarian doctrine. It is impossible to understand his theology without a precise interpretation of this term. I believe however that, over the years, it has been repeatedly mis-interpreted. In the technical Trinitarian terminology of post-Nicene theology, the term ὑπόστασις came to be used as the Greek version of the Latin term *persona*. It was used to distinguish the three persons of the consubstantial Trinity.<sup>237</sup> As such, it was the equivalent of Aristotle’s ‘primary οὐσία’, i.e. an individual instance of the same generic οὐσία, the οὐσία of divinity.<sup>238</sup>

It is extremely tempting, particularly for Origen’s apologists, to seize upon his use of the term ὑπόστασις as proof of precocious orthodox credentials. Indeed it is common scholarly practice to interpret the term in Origen’s oeuvre in a precise and technical post-Nicene sense. For example, Heine explicitly argues that Origen uses ὑπόστασις in the same way as Tertullian uses *persona* and

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<sup>233</sup> See sections 4.3-5.4.

<sup>234</sup> ὄντα δύο τῇ ὑποστάσει πράγματα, ἐν δὲ τῇ ὁμονοίᾳ καὶ τῇ συμφωνίᾳ καὶ τῇ ταυτότητι τοῦ βουλήματος. See chapter 2, section 4.2 for a further discussion of this important passage.

<sup>235</sup> Witt (1933), p.335; Logan (1987), p.427.

<sup>236</sup> See also *ibid.* 65.2, 65.3, 73.12.

<sup>237</sup> On this, see Bicknell (1950), pp.64-5.

<sup>238</sup> On this point, see Prestige (1969), p.162 and Edwards (2002), p.68.

Hippolytus uses πρόσωπον, namely as ‘individual existent’.<sup>239</sup> Trigg, Orbe, Bigg and Bethune-Baker give the same interpretation.<sup>240</sup> Cécélie Blanc is even more specific. She explicitly claims Origen as the first exponent of Nicene catholic orthodoxy: “ὑπόστασις a, lui, le sens qui demeurera après Nicée, celui d’existence distincte, de réalité individuelle. Et c’est sans doute la première fois qu’il sert à définir les personnes de la Trinité.”<sup>241</sup>

It seems obvious to me however that Origen did not use the term ὑπόστασις to mean ‘individual existent’ and that those scholars who claim that he did are guilty of a blatantly anachronistic projection.<sup>242</sup> An overview of the uses of the term elsewhere in Origen’s oeuvre reveal that it is used either to mean ‘nature/substance’ or to mean ‘objective reality’ as opposed to a subjective, mental construction. I find no examples of the use of the term to mean ‘individual’.<sup>243</sup>

(7.3)

Dörrie is correct to argue that the terms ὑπόστασις and φύσις are not distinguished by Origen.<sup>244</sup> There are many examples of the use of the former to mean ‘nature’. For example, in the *Commentary on St John*, Origen twice applies the term to the two natures of Christ.<sup>245</sup> At *Commentary on St John* 20.21 (19), Origen argues that if the devil were a liar κατὰ ὑπόστασιν, he could not be blamed: this must mean – if the devil were a liar *by nature* . . . At *Commentary on St John* 20.22 (20), Origen discusses the προηγουμένη ὑπόστασις of humans, meaning their ‘primary nature’. The *Contra Celsum* provides us with further examples of this use of the term. Origen speaks of the ὑπόστασις of souls (*Contra Celsum* 6.26), the ὑπόστασις of evil (*ibid.* 6.56), the ὑπόστασις of all things (*ibid.* 6.65) and the ὑπόστασις of the angels (*ibid.* 6.71). Similarly, in chapter 27.8 of the treatise *On Prayer*, Origen discusses the ὑπόστασις of incorporeal things. In the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, we find reference to the ὑπόστασις of water and the ὑπόστασις of mortal beings.<sup>246</sup> It is interesting to note that Plotinus appears to share Origen’s semantic framework. That is to say, he too uses the term ὑπόστασις to mean ‘nature’

<sup>239</sup> Heine (1998), p.73.

<sup>240</sup> Trigg (1983), p.96, Orbe (1991), p.47, Bigg (1913), pp.202-3 and Bethune-Baker (1933), p.78.

<sup>241</sup> Blanc (1966), p.401.

<sup>242</sup> Hammerstaedt (1991) has strongly argued against this in a very useful article on the use of the term ὑπόστασις in Origen’s Trinitarian theology.

<sup>243</sup> I do not deny that this might well have been the primary meaning of the term for the Stoics (Witt (1933), pp.321-322, 342-343).

<sup>244</sup> Dörrie (1976), p.53.

<sup>245</sup> *Commentary on St John* 2.35 (29) and 32.9 (20).

<sup>246</sup> *Homilies on Jeremiah* 18.4 and *ibid.* in *Philocalia* 1.28.

or 'substance'. For example, he refers to the *ὑπόστασις* of wisdom (*Ennead* 1.4.9) and the *ὑπόστασις* of matter (*ibid.* 1.8.15).<sup>247</sup>

We have already discussed how Origen often juxtaposes the term *ὑπόστασις* with the term *ἐπίνοια*.<sup>248</sup> Against the Monarchian theory that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are merely verbally distinct, Origen insists that they are distinct *κατα ὑπόστασιν* (*Commentary on St John* 10.37 (21)). This use of the term is paralleled in fragment 36 of the *Commentary on St John*, where the water of baptism and the Spirit are distinguished *κατα ὑπόστασιν* and not merely *κατ' ἐπίνοιαν*. Similarly, at *Contra Celsum* 8.67, Origen asks the pagan allegorists whether Athena has an *ὑπόστασις* that corresponds to her metaphorical attributes. At *Contra Celsum* 1.23 Origen makes very similar remarks concerning the *ὑπόστασις* of Mnemosyne: does she have an existence above and beyond her various mythological and allegorical attributes? In fragment 16 of the *Commentary on Lamentations*, Origen refers to those who are God's enemies *ἢτοι τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ ἢ καὶ τῇ ὑποστάσει*. In these passages, the term *ὑπόστασις* is to be translated as 'reality' or 'genuine existence', as opposed to a purely mental construction.<sup>249</sup>

This use of the term was popular with the Stoics.<sup>250</sup> Gerson notes that Plotinus also uses *ὑπόστασις* to mean 'extra-mental existent'.<sup>251</sup> He refers to *Ennead* 6.2.13 as a particularly clear example of this. In this passage, Plotinus argues that numbers have an objective existence outside the mind: they must be considered according to *ὑπόστασις* and not merely according to *ἐπίνοια*. Similarly, at *Ennead* 3.7.13, Plotinus is keen to assure his readers that time exists *ἐν ὑποστάσει* and *ἐν ὑάρξει*, i.e. it is not a purely mental category. We have already discussed how Plotinus objects to the Gnostic system of aeons: if the *ὑποστάσεις* are distinct only in *ἐπίνοια*, they are not *ὑποστάσεις* at all (*Ennead* 2.9.1).<sup>252</sup>

#### Οὐσία AND ὑπόστασις IN ORIGEN'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

(8.1)

We conclude this section with the firm assurance that Origen always uses the terms *οὐσία* and *ὑπόστασις* to mean 'nature', 'substance' or 'objective reality'. I cannot agree with those scholars who seek to explain or excuse Origen's Trinitarian doctrine by interpreting these terms as

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<sup>247</sup> For a discussion of these passages, see Gerson (1994), p.3. Witt (1933), p.336 notes that Plotinus uses the term *ὑπόστασις* as a synonym for *οὐσία*. He also points out, p.320, that Augustine could see no lexical distinction between *οὐσία* and *ὑπόστασις* (*de Trinitate* 5.8). Urmson (1990) argues that it was common practice amongst later Greek philosophers, especially the Neo-Platonists, to conflate the two terms.

<sup>248</sup> See section 5.3.

<sup>249</sup> I am grateful to Witt (1933), p.334 and Borret (1969), p.200 for some of the above references.

<sup>250</sup> See Witt (1933), discussed in section 5.3.

<sup>251</sup> Gerson (1994), p.1.

‘person’. It is quite obvious that this is not what Origen means. Moreover, as we shall shortly see, Origen has important philosophical and theological reasons for positing a clear distinction between Father, Son and Holy Ghost and for preaching a thorough subordinationism. Had Origen been aware of a term to describe the Son as merely a different *person*, as merely an individual instance of one and the same divine substance, he would not have wanted to use it. Those scholars who lament the lack of technical vocabulary in third century Greek Trinitarian theology and who try to twist the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις to mean ‘person’ are guilty of anachronism. Whatever might be the concerns of the Fathers at Nicaea, Origen had no need and no desire to view the Son as *merely* numerically distinct from the Father.

(8.2)

Let us return briefly to those passages from the *Commentary on St John* in which Origen refutes the Monarchians by claiming that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three distinct and individual οὐσίαι/ὑποστάσεις. As we have seen, Hanson and his fellow apologists interpret these claims as purely and simply the refutation of Monarchianism, the bare and bald assertion that there are three numerically distinct persons in the Trinity and that these three persons are of the same nature and the same ontological status. I cannot accept this. It seems to me that any close and careful reading of these passages supports my contention that Origen uses the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις in the secondary sense, to mean ‘nature’ or ‘substance’. Whenever Origen claims that the Son and the Holy Ghost are different in οὐσία or different in ὑπόστασις from the Father, he immediately justifies or explains this claim by describing a strictly hierarchical Trinity. In these passages, Origen is concerned with much more than a mere numerical or ‘personal’ distinction.

At *Commentary on St John* 1.38 (42), having ridiculed the Monarchian exegesis of Psalm 45 and having argued that the Son is distinct from the Father as an individual οὐσία and an individual ὑπόστασις, Origen proceeds to envisage for the Son the rôle of a Middle-Platonic intermediary. Although he will not accept that the Son is *literally* the word of God, Origen exploits the metaphor to the full and shows how the Son fulfils all the functions of a quasi voice. ‘God’s Word’ announces what is in his heart; he reports the secrets of his Father. As with us, the spoken word is the messenger of what the mind perceives, so the Son is the messenger of the Father. If Origen meant that the Son were

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<sup>252</sup> See section 5.3.



simply a different ‘person’, a numerically distinct instance of the same generic nature as the Father, the Son would be unable to fulfil such a rôle. A mediator must be ontologically inferior.<sup>253</sup>

At *Commentary on St John* 2.10 (6), Origen responds to the Monarchians by arguing (a) that the οὐσία of the Holy Ghost is different from the οὐσία of the Father and from the οὐσία of the Son and (b) that there are three ὑποστάσεις in the Trinity. That these claims are not to be read as a simple assertion of numerical distinction is obvious from the argument that follows. Origen proceeds to describe a carefully graded Trinity, in terms that owe a very great deal to traditional Platonic ontology. Throughout the chapter, Origen stresses the dependent and contingent nature of both the Son and the Holy Ghost: only the Father is ἀγέννητος. The original claim that the Holy Ghost is an individual and distinct οὐσία is glossed and expanded as meaning that the Holy Ghost is a thoroughly subordinate and inferior being. The Spirit utterly depends upon the Son for both his existence *simpliciter* and his characteristic existence as wise:

μόνου τοῦ μονογενοῦς φύσει υἱοῦ ἀρχῆθεν τυγχάνοντος, οὗ χρῆζειν ἔοικε τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα διακονοῦντος αὐτοῦ τῇ ὑποστάσει, οὐ μόνον εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἀλλὰ καὶ σοφὸν εἶναι καὶ λογικὸν καὶ δίκαιον καὶ πᾶν ὅτιποτὸν χρῆ αὐτὸ νοεῖν τυγχάνειν κατὰ μετοχὴν τῶν προειρημένων ἡμῖν Χριστοῦ εἰνοιῶν.<sup>254</sup>

We reach a similar conclusion by re-reading the arguments of *Commentary on St John* 10.37 (21). Origen begins by arguing that the Son is a different οὐσία and a different ὑπόστασις from the Father. He then explains or justifies these claims by reminding his readers of Christ’s words to the Jews at John 5.19: *Verily, verily I say unto you, the Son can do nothing by himself, but what he sees the Father do, the Son does*. Origen then concludes, *à propos* the Resurrection, that it was the Father who enabled or empowered the Son to perform this miracle (τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῷ τοῦτο χαριζομένου).<sup>255</sup> Once again, we see that Origen responds to the Monarchians by positing a radical and thorough distinction between the persons of the Trinity. In this passage, the Son is presented as a dependent and helpless being, who can act only as his Father dictates.

<sup>253</sup> On this point, see especially sections 10-11. Lyman (1994), p.40 agrees with me that if the Logos is to be the Mediator, his subordination is axiomatic.

<sup>254</sup> See section 9.2 for a further discussion of this passage, particularly its Platonic provenance.

<sup>255</sup> This passage can be usefully compared to Origen’s exegesis of John 5.19 at *de Principiis* 1.2.12. In both passages, Origen emphasizes the Son’s absolute obedience to and dependence upon the dictates of his Father. In the *de Principiis* passage, Origen compares the Son to a mirror which copies exactly the movements of the one looking into the glass: *sicut ergo in speculo omnibus motibus atque omnibus actibus, quibus is qui speculum intuetur movetur vel agit, isdem ipsis etiam ea imago; quae per speculum deformatur, actibus et motibus commovetur vel agit, in nullo prorsus declinans*.

Finally, we have the clinching evidence of *Commentary on St John* 2.23 (18). In this passage, as we have seen, Origen elaborates the claim that the Father and the Son are different κατ οὐσίαν by detailing the thorough subordination of the Son to the Father. The Father is πλείων, μείζων and κρείττων than the Son and surpasses (ὑπερέχει) him. To be different κατ οὐσίαν means much more than being simply numerically distinct.

So while it is of course true that Origen develops his new Trinitarian theology as a direct and deliberate refutation of Monarchianism, we must be careful that we do not mistake his counter claims as purely and simply the refutation of Monarchianism, i.e. as purely and simply the assertion of numerical or personal distinction. For Origen, the distinction between the three persons of the Trinity is much more fundamental. It is the distinction of three different natures, each with their own tasks to perform and their own rôles to play. In the remaining sections of this chapter, we shall see how Origen's theological imperatives demand the establishment of a strictly hierarchical Trinity. The fact that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are different in nature and different in substance is not simply the response to Monarchian unitarianism; it is crucial to Origen's entire theological system.<sup>256</sup>

## THE FATHER AND THE SON: TRANSCENDENCE AND SUBORDINATION

### (9.1)

In section 2.1 we saw how Origen developed an exciting new Trinitarian paradigm, by being the first to describe the eternal generation of the Son. In conscious rejection of the old Apologist paradigm of the two-stage Logos, Origen proclaimed the Son to be an eternal aspect of the divine nature and not simply a temporary economic necessity. But we must not be misled by the famous and innovative doctrine of eternal generation into believing that Origen thereby implied that the Father and the Son were of equal status. For Origen, as for the vast majority of ancient philosophers, eternal existence was certainly not the guarantee of ontological superiority: pre-eminence was the prerogative not of the temporally prior, but of the logically or causally prior. The *locus classicus* for this theory is the *Enneads* of Plotinus. Having accepted the eternal existence of all reality, Plotinus is still able to structure the universe as a strict hierarchy. For example, although they have both existed eternally, the One is infinitely superior to Nous. The reason for this superiority is that the One has caused Nous to

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<sup>256</sup> This point is also emphasized by Trigg (1983), p.96 and Edwards (2002), p.67: the Son needs to be distinct from the Father in order to fulfil his rôles and functions as a *dieu subalterne*. It could be argued therefore that Origen's major objection to Monarchian theology was that it nullified the notions of transcendence and subordinationism that were so crucial to his philosophical system.

exist; the One is logically or causally prior and is therefore superior.<sup>257</sup> Origen's doctrine of the generation of the Son is similar in many ways to Plotinus' doctrine of the emanation of Nous. We must always remember that Origen is working within the same framework of orthodox Platonic philosophy.<sup>258</sup> In any such system, the gulf between cause and effect, producer and produced, is such as to provoke a necessary and inevitable subordinationism. For Origen therefore the subordinate status of the Son is the unavoidable consequence of causal dependence.<sup>259</sup> Although he exists eternally, the Son is inferior to the Father because he is a contingent and needy being who depends absolutely upon the Father for every moment of his existence. We have already discussed how Origen interprets the eternal generation of the Son as a continuous begetting and how this implies a continuous causal dependence. As the rays of the sun are eternally dependent upon their source and origin, so is the Son eternally dependent upon the Father.<sup>260</sup> This model of the Son's reliance on the Father is repeated and elaborated throughout Origen's oeuvre.

(9.2)

At *Commentary on St John* 2.23 (18). Origen explains the subordination of the Son to the Father by arguing that it is simply because the Father is the Father, i.e. the cause or producer, that he surpasses the Son. Applying the traditional Platonic dogma that the cause is necessarily greater than the effect, Origen thoroughly subordinates the Son to the Father: ὁ δὲ λόγος ὁ πατὴρ τῆς ἀληθείας θεὸς πλείων ἐστὶ καὶ μείζων ἢ ἀλήθεια καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὧν σοφίας κρείττων ἐστὶ καὶ διαφέρων ἢ σοφία, τούτῳ ὑπερέχει τοῦ εἶναι "φῶς ἀληθινόν". This Trinitarian paradigm is very similar to the one described at *Commentary on St John* 2.10 (6), discussed above.<sup>261</sup> Throughout this passage, Origen stresses the dependent and contingent nature of both the Son and the Holy Ghost. Only the Father is independent and self-sufficient, because only he is ἀγέννητος. By contrast, the Son and the Holy Ghost are causally dependent upon their immediate prior. Origen explicitly argues that the Holy Ghost is 'in need' (χρῆζειν) of the Son, that it is by 'participation' (μετοχῇ) in the Son that the Holy Ghost comes into being.

<sup>257</sup> See especially *Ennead* 5.1.6 and 5.3.15.

<sup>258</sup> Despite Edwards' argument in his recent work, *Origen Against Plato* (2002).

<sup>259</sup> Bigg (1913), p.243, rightly notes that the basic difference between the Father and the Son is 'the difference between cause and effect'. He does not however place this belief within the correct Platonic context and does not therefore recognize the extreme subordinationism that it inevitably involves. Edwards (2002), p.70 is much closer to the mark: "The Father is superior to the other two hypostases in so far as they are logically, if not temporally, posterior to his act of generation."

<sup>260</sup> See especially *Homily on Jeremiah* 9.4, discussed in section 2.1.

<sup>261</sup> See sections 5.2 and 8.2.

This theory of participation is most fully developed at *Commentary on St John* 2.2. Origen begins by describing a dilemma that can easily beset well-meaning Christians who are anxious to escape the heresy of ditheism:

- (1) Either they deny the individuality of the Son and argue that one and the same God is simply *called* the Son (i.e. the Monarchians).
- (2) Or they deny the divinity of the Son, arguing that his οὐσία is distinct from that of the Father and that they are separate and different from one another (i.e. the Adoptionists).

και τὸ πολλοὺς φιλοθέους εἶναι εὐχομένους ταράσσον, εὐλαβουμένους δύο ἀναγορεύσαι θεοὺς καὶ παρὰ τοῦτο περι πίπτοντας ψευδέσι καὶ ἀσεβέσι δόγμασιν, ἧτοι ἀρνούμενους ιδιότητα υἱοῦ ἑτέραν παρὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ὁμολογούντας θεὸν εἶναι τὸν μέχρι ὀνόματος παρ' αὐτοῖς "υἱὸν" προσαορευόμενον, ἢ ἀρνούμενους τὴν θεότητα τοῦ υἱοῦ τιθέντας δὲ αὐτοῦ τὴν ιδιότητα καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν κατὰ περιγραφὴν τυγχάνουσιν ἑτέραν τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐντεῦθεν λύεσθαι δύναται.<sup>262</sup>

In solving this dilemma, Origen must assert both the individuality of the Son and his divinity.<sup>263</sup> To believe that the Son is an individual οὐσία, distinct from the Father, need not automatically lead to Adoptionism. Origen's solution is to distinguish αὐτόθεος from θεός and to identify the former with the Father and the latter with the Son. By using the term αὐτόθεος, Origen implies that the Father is the 'form' of divinity, 'divinity itself', in which the Son participates and thus becomes, is made, divine: πᾶν δὲ τὸ παρὰ τὸ αὐτόθεος μετοχῇ τῆς ἐκείνου θεότητος θεοποιούμενον οὐχ "ὁ θεός" ἀλλὰ "θεός" (*Commentary on St John* 2.2).

Both the argument and the language of this passage are overtly and deliberately Platonic. It is simply a Christian version of the theory of forms. As Christopher Rowe points out, the term traditionally used for a form is αὐτὸ τὸ F.<sup>264</sup> At *Phaedo* 75-8, for example, we read of αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν (the form of beauty), αὐτὸ τὸ αγαθόν (the form of goodness), αὐτὸ τὸ δίκαιον (the form of justice) and αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον (the form of equality).<sup>265</sup>

<sup>262</sup> Hein (1993), p.100 discusses this passage and agrees with me that the first group described by Origen are the Modalistic Monarchians and the second group are the Dynamic Monarchians or Adoptionists. Balas (1975), pp.269-170 also discusses this passage, albeit very briefly.

<sup>263</sup> It is interesting to note that we find exactly the same dilemma in the *Dialogue with Heraclides* 1.6-2.27: anxious to escape both Monarchianism and Adoptionism, Maximus has fallen headlong into the heresy of Ditheism.

<sup>264</sup> Rowe (1993), p.7.

<sup>265</sup> The same language is used in book 6 of the *Republic*, where Plato similarly speaks of αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν and αὐτὸ τὸ αγαθόν. At *Symposium* 211CE, Diotima repeatedly refers to αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν and at *Phaedrus* 25D, Socrates describes the soul's vision of αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν.

By describing God the Father as αὐτόθεος, Origen is using technical terminology that would be instantly recognized by his erudite readers. But it is not only the terminology that recalls Platonic ontology. The very rôle and function of God the Father described in this passage is remarkably similar to the rôle and function of the forms in Plato's metaphysics. For Plato, the forms perform a vital causative or creative rôle. It is, for example, the unique 'form of beauty' that *causes* the many beautiful things of this world to be beautiful. Indeed at *Phaedo* 100B the forms are explicitly described as αἰτία. This doctrine of the causative or creative power of the forms is mythologically elaborated in the *Timaeus*, in which Plato describes the created world as modelled upon the world of the forms (*Timaeus* 30). At *Commentary on St John* 2.2, Origen ascribes a very similar creative or causative power to God the Father: as the 'form of divinity', the Father causes the Son to be divine; he divinizes him (θεοποιούμενον).

The relationship between a form and its many phenomenal instances is often described in terms of participation. In the *Symposium*, Diotima argues that it is by participation in the form of beauty that beautiful things become beautiful: ἀλλ' αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πάντα καλὰ ἐκείνου μετέχοντα τρόπον τινὰ τοιοῦτον (*Symposium* 211B). We find the same argument in the *Phaedo*: εἰ τί ἐστιν ἄλλο καλὸν πλὴν αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, οὐδὲ δι' ἐν ἄλλο καλὸν εἶναι ἢ διότι μετέχει ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ (*Phaedo* 100C). The doctrine of participation is central to Plato's explanation of physical reality.<sup>266</sup> Origen adopts the same scheme, virtually unchanged, when he argues that it is by participation (μετοχή) in the Father – *qua* the form of divinity – that the Son becomes divine.<sup>267</sup>

But by describing the relationship between the Father and the Son in terms of participation, Origen is in danger of reducing the status of the Son to that of a fake copy compared with the genuine original. This

<sup>266</sup> At least in what are generally known as the 'Middle-Period Dialogues'.

<sup>267</sup> Edwards (2002) has devoted an entire book to distinguishing Platonism and Origenism, to proving that – despite an almost universal scholarly consensus – Origen's system is in fact entirely different from that of a Platonist. This bold revisionist thesis includes a discussion of Origen's doctrine of the Son's participation in the Father, in particular the use of the term αὐτόθεος (pp.71-72). Edwards explicitly argues that Origen's Trinitarian theology has nothing whatever in common with the Platonic theory of forms: "Had *autotheos* been the neologism of a Platonist, it would no doubt have implied that God the Father is the paradigm in which an infinite host of other gods participates: Origen, however, does not teach that the Son 'participates' in the Father." These claims are surely refuted by the unambiguous evidence of *Commentary on St John* 2.2, in which Origen explicitly states that it is by 'participation' (μετοχή) in the Father as the form of divinity (αὐτόθεος) that the Son is divinized (θεοποιούμενον). Moreover, Origen goes on to say that those other 'gods' spoken of in the Bible are ordinary men and women who have been similarly 'divinized' by 'participation'. Despite Edwards'

is of course an important implication of Plato's dual ontology. Only the forms have genuine existence: their many phenomenal instances are poor imitations, striving for likeness to their archetype but necessarily falling far short. This doctrine is most clearly expressed in the *Symposium*, where Diotima describes the ascent to the form of beauty which involves the transcending and ultimate rejection of the many *seemingly* beautiful things in favour of the one genuine beauty (*Symposium* 209E-212A). Explaining the Trinity according to the Platonic scheme of participation, Origen implies that the Son is not the full, complete and genuine divinity. This is the prerogative of the Father. It is with this in mind that Origen describes the Son as simply θεός and the Father as ὁ θεός, with the article.

It is interesting to compare this passage from the *Commentary on St John* with *de Principiis* 1.2.13 (= Justinian, *Epistle to Mennas*, in Mansi 9.525).<sup>268</sup> Here too Origen compares the Father to a Platonic form and the Son to one who participates in the form. The Father is described as αὐτοαγαθόν, the form of goodness: as such, he is purely or absolutely good (ἁπλῶς ἀγαθός). The Son is merely the image (εἰκὼν) of this goodness, an inferior copy. Similarly, he is merely the image of the Father's divinity, not 'the one true God' (John 17.3).<sup>269</sup> The term εἰκὼν is also part of the technical vocabulary of orthodox Platonism. It is the conventional, derogatory way to describe the objects of the phenomenal world, unfavourably compared with the one original archetype.<sup>270</sup> Once again, we see that the status of the Son has been undermined by the adoption of the Platonic model of participation.<sup>271</sup>

Origen concludes the argument of *Commentary on St John* 2.2, by re-iterating that the Son is not divine by virtue of his own intrinsic nature (οὐκ ἂν δ' αὐτὸ ἐσχηκώς), but is wholly dependent upon the divinity of the Father. The Son draws or attracts this to himself: σπάσας τῆς θεότητος εἰς ἑαυτόν. It is the divinity of the Father – and that alone – that causes the Son to be divine. Origen describes this

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arguments, we can only conclude that Origen's doctrine of participation as described at *Commentary on St John* 2.2 is overtly and conventionally Platonic.

<sup>268</sup> See also Jerome's translation of this passage given at *Letter to Avitus* 2 (quoted in Butterworth (1966), p.27).

<sup>269</sup> c.f. *Commentary on St John* 2.2, where Origen quotes the same verse with the same gloss: the Son is not the one true God, but an inferior copy of this primal divinity.

<sup>270</sup> See especially Books 6 and 7 of the *Republic*. Dillon (1992), pp.16-17 discusses this point. It is interesting to compare *Commentary on St John* 6.6 (3), where Origen contrasts αὐτοαλήθεια, the πρωτότυπος of Truth (Christ), with its many εἰκόνες (true and just souls). Passage referred to by Bostock (1975), p.247.

<sup>271</sup> Balas (1975), pp. 262-3 and 269-270 discusses Origen's doctrine of participation as it applies to the Trinity. He rightly notes that the doctrine involves notions of 'derived', 'dependent' and 'lower' possession compared with the 'full' and 'upper' possession enjoyed by the 'source'. Gregg and Groh (1981), p.108-110 provide a brief discussion of Origen's doctrine of the Son's participation in the Father. They point out that the Stoics distinguished 'according to nature' from 'by participation'.

causal relationship in terms of contemplation. It is by contemplating the Father's divinity that the Son becomes divine:

ἀλλὰ πάλιν τῶν πλειόνων εἰκόνων ἡ ἀρχέτυπος εἰκὼν ὁ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἐστὶ λόγος, ὃς "ἐν ἀρχῇ" ἦν, τῷ εἶναι "πρὸς τὸν θεόν" ἀεὶ μένων "θεός", οὐκ ἂν δ' αὐτὸ ἐσχηκώς εἰ μὴ πρὸς θεὸν ἦν, καὶ οὐκ ἂν μείνας θεός, εἰ μὴ παρέμενε τῇ ἀδιαλείπτῳ θέᾳ τοῦ πατρικοῦ βάθους (*Commentary on St John* 2.2).

Once more, Origen is keen to stress the contingent and dependent status of the Son. He is God only in so far as, and only as long as, he contemplates the Father. We have already discussed how Origen interprets the eternal begetting of the Son as a *continuous* begetting and how this implies a continuous dependence. The same idea permeates the present passage. The eternal existence of the Son as God depends upon an eternal contemplation (ἀδιαλείπτῳ θέᾳ) of the Father. If he were ever to 'look away', he would cease to be divine. We note how Origen draws particular attention to John's claim that the Word was *with God* (John 1.1). This is taken as further Scriptural proof of the Son's subordinate status: he is 'God' only because he is *with God*.<sup>272</sup>

This 'contemplation-model' is also Platonic.<sup>273</sup> Plotinus uses it to describe the relationship of Intellect to the One and of Soul to Intellect. The image is most fully developed at *Ennead* 5.2.1: τὸ δὲ γενόμενον εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη καὶ ἐπληρώθη καὶ ἐγένετο πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπων καὶ νοῦς οὗτος. καὶ ἡ μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις αὐτοῦ τὸ ὄν ἐποίησεν, ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ θέα τὸν νοῦν. 'επεὶ οὖν ἔστι πρὸς αὐτό, ἵνα ἴδῃ, ὁμοῦ νοῦς γίγνεται καὶ ὄν. Similarly, soul achieves its fullness by contemplating Intellect: 'ἐκεῖ μὲν οὖν βλέπουσα, ὅθεν ἐγένετο, πληροῦται'.<sup>274</sup> For both Plotinus and Origen, the lower hypostases are eternally dependent upon their immediate prior. This dependence is expressed in terms of contemplation.

We also note that at *Ennead* 5.2.1, Plotinus argues that it is the 'station' or 'position' of the Intellect, specifically its proximity to the One, that is the cause of its existence: 'επεὶ οὖν ἔστι πρὸς αὐτό, ἵνα ἴδῃ, ὁμοῦ νοῦς γίγνεται καὶ ὄν. This claim can be usefully compared to Origen's exegesis of John 1.1, discussed above: the Son is God only because he is *with God*

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Origen was certainly very familiar with Stoic philosophy (see Chadwick (1947) and would undoubtedly have been aware of this distinction.

<sup>272</sup> See *Commentary on St John* 2.1, discussed next, for an elaboration of this argument.

<sup>273</sup> Kelly (1958), p.128 refers to Albinus, *Handbook* 14.3.

<sup>274</sup> See also *Ennead* 5.1.6, 5.3.11, 6.7.16, 6.7.17

(πρὸς τὸν θεόν). This argument is more fully developed at *Commentary on St John* 2.1. Origen begins by drawing particular attention to the order of the phrases in the first verse of the first chapter of John:

1. *The word was with God.*
2. *The word was God.*

He then argues that the Evangelist had good reason for arranging the verse in this particular way. The order of the phrases illustrates or explains the relationship of the Father and the Son. The divinity of the Word is solely and wholly the result of his 'proximity' to the Father. He is God because and only because he is 'with' (πρὸς) the one true God: διὰ τοῦτο, ἵνα δυνηθῇ ἀπὸ τοῦ "πρὸς τὸν θεόν" εἶναι ὁ λόγος νοηθῆναι γινόμενος θεός, λέγεται· "καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν", ἔπειτα· "καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος" (*Commentary on St John* 2.1).

The Saviour's famous reply to the disciples who try to share their pic-nic with him, *I have food to eat which you do not know* (John 4.32), provides further material for discussion on the contingent and dependent nature of the Son. Origen begins by arguing that, like men and angels, the Son requires spiritual nourishment and that this is, moreover, an *eternal* requirement. As we constantly require food, so the Son constantly requires the Father. Once again, we see Origen focus on the Father's continuous sustaining of the Son. As the Mediaeval scholastic philosophers speak of the need for the Father's constant succour and support for the continued existence of the universe, in the same way does Origen describe the Father's relationship to the Son.<sup>275</sup> The Son does not exist independently, but requires the constant sustaining and preserving activity of the Father. If that support were withdrawn, the Son would cease to exist. The Son depends upon the Father not simply for his original existence, for the fact that he came into being, but for every instant, so to speak, of his eternal existence. This eternal 'neediness' is strongly contrasted with the eternal self-sufficiency and independence of the Father. Origen insists that only the Father is ἀνεκδεοῦς and αὐτάρκους:

καὶ οὐκ ἄτοπόν γε λέγειν μὴ μόνον ἀνθρώπους καὶ ἀγγέλους ἐκδεεῖς εἶναι τῶν νοητῶν τροφῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν Χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ· καὶ αὐτὸς γάρ, ἵν' οὕτως εἶπω, ἐπισκευάζεται αἰεὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ μόνου ἀνεκδεοῦς καὶ αὐτάρκους αὐτῷ (*Commentary on St John* 13.34).<sup>276</sup>

Origen stresses the contingent and dependent status of the Son throughout the *Commentary on St John*. Only the Father is unbegotten, self-sufficient and independent. By contrast, the Son relies wholly,

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<sup>275</sup> Aquinas, for example, emphasizes the intrinsic and eternal existential dependence of all created beings. See Coppleston (1955), p.137. We make use of some of Coppleston's terminology in our analysis of Origen's doctrine.



absolutely and continually upon the Father.<sup>277</sup> As such, within the context at least of Origen's orthodox Platonism, the Son is a necessarily inferior being. In the following section of this chapter, we shall see how this ontological fact is exploited to the full. The Son is assigned rôles and tasks that suit perfectly an inferior, even servile, being.

(10.1)

We have already discussed in some detail (section 1.2) how Origen's predecessors, the Apologists, saw the Son as purely and simply an economic tool, the Father's means of communicating *ad extra*. It is the Son who is the creator and redeemer of the world and who is responsible for all providential intervention. The transcendence of the Father is such that he must never leave his lofty abode to deal directly with his creation, but is always obliged to work through an intermediary. Since mediation was the Son's entire *raison d'être*, the Apologists argued that he came into existence only when he *needed* to exist, only on the 'eve' of creation. In direct and obvious contrast to this theological paradigm, Origen preached the eternal existence of the Son as the *sine qua non* of the eternal existence of essential divine attributes. Without the Son, God would not be wise, rational, powerful etc. The Son is not simply a temporary economic necessity, but an eternal and essential component of the divine nature. As we have shown, Origen explained the existence of the Son first and foremost in terms of the life of God.<sup>278</sup> But this is not the whole story. Although the Son is to be identified with essential and eternal divine attributes and although he is integral to the fullness of divine life, he is nevertheless the tool or servant of the transcendent Father. There is a very important element of delegation in Origen's Trinitarian theology which must not be ignored. Like his predecessors, Origen believes that it is the Son who deals directly with fallen man, who communicates with him, educates him and who gradually prepares him for the ultimate revelation of God the Father.

(10.2)

Origen agreed with the Apologists that God the Father was a transcendent and ultimately incomprehensible being. He too had read and was deeply influenced by the philosophy of Middle-

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<sup>276</sup> c.f. Albinus *Handbook* 10.3: only the first God is ἀπροσδεής (Blanc (1975), p.149).

<sup>277</sup> Russell (1988), pp.54-55 argues that Origen distinguishes the participation of the Son as a peculiar kind of participation, namely 'self-existent', 'static' and 'ontological'. He distinguishes this from the kind of participation which can be enjoyed by ordinary souls and which is 'contingent' and 'dynamic'. While it is of course obvious that Origen does not reduce the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son to the temporary, precarious participation of the blessed (see chapter 3, section 9.3), it cannot be denied that the doctrine of participation implies, by very definition, the notion of contingency. Moreover, as we have seen, Origen repeatedly argues that only the Father is self-sufficient; the Son is eternally 'in need'.

Platonism.<sup>279</sup> Origen's theology, as developed in the first chapter of the *de Principiis*, reveals a being who is (once again) very different from the loving Father portrayed in the Bible. Like the God of Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras and Theophilus, Origen's God has been transformed into a Middle-Platonic First Principle. As far as he can be described at all, he is 'simple intellectual existence' (*de Principiis* 1.1.6). There is no mention here of the love of God or of his concern for creation. Origen's main aim in this chapter seems to be the rather repetitive insistence that God is entirely incorporeal. This is presumably intended both as a nod to pagan religious sensibilities and as a rejection of Gnostic materialism.<sup>280</sup> But there is nothing specifically or even characteristically Christian about Origen's description of God. The first chapter of the *de Principiis* could very easily have been written by a pagan.

In chapters 1.1.5-6 of the *de Principiis* Origen repeats the claim of the Apologists that the transcendent God can never be fully known. He introduces the discussion with an unambiguous statement of divine incomprehensibility: *dicimus secundum veritatem quidem deum incomprehensibilem esse atque inaestimabilem*. Whatever might be our present perception of God, it will necessarily fall far short of his reality. Using an image that has some interesting echoes of Buddhist theology, Origen compares the search for God to the attempt to understand the brightness of the sun by understanding the glimmer of a tiny lamp. Knowledge of God is simply beyond our present capabilities.<sup>281</sup> Origen then repeats the doctrine, which we have already met in Justin and Theophilus, that an appreciation of the wonders of nature and of the meticulous workings of divine providence may allow us to infer the greatness of their

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<sup>278</sup> See section 3.

<sup>279</sup> It is of course impossible to know precisely all the works read by Origen. Gregory Thaumaturgos (*Panegyric* 13) and Eusebius (*H.E.* 6.19) both tell us how much he valued pagan philosophy. Dillon (1992), p.13 and (1988), p.223, Lyman (1993), p.89 and Trigg (1983), p.69 argue that Origen had certainly read Numenius: indeed he is actually cited at *Contra Celsum* 1.15 and 4.51. Dillon (1993), p.v points out that Albinus is never cited by name until the 6<sup>th</sup> century, but that this does not mean that his work was not used as a preliminary handbook, his ideas absorbed and tacitly reproduced. Indeed, Dillon (1988), p.227 suspects that he influenced Origen. Even without a precise *Quellenforschung*, it is still possible and indeed necessary to place Origen's philosophy within the intellectual milieu of Middle-Platonism.

<sup>280</sup> Edwards (2002), p.57 suggests that Origen's insistence on divine incorporeality was also aimed at Epicurean and Stoic materialism. Dillon (1988), p.218 suggests that the arguments of *de Principiis* 1.1.1-4 are a deliberate response to objections raised by pagan polemicists, maybe even in direct debate with Origen.

<sup>281</sup> Did Origen believe that created souls could *never* understand God or was this ignorance simply the temporary handicap of being in a body? The answer to this is not immediately obvious, since Origen appears to contradict himself (compare, for example, *de Principiis* 1.1.5-6 with *de Principiis* 4.3.14). It seems to me however that the famous Origenist doctrine of 'satiety' (κόρος), according to which souls have their fill of the Beatific Vision, become bored and so fall again (*de Principiis* 1.3.8, 1.4.1) implies that God can indeed be fully known (Otis (1958), p.102 discusses Origen's doctrine of satiety). It was

originator and creator.<sup>282</sup> But Origen adds the all-important proviso that this method will reveal only the δυνάμεις of God and not his οὐσία, the warmth and illumination of the sun and not the sun itself.<sup>283</sup> The doctrine of the transcendence and incomprehensibility of God is repeated at *de Principiis* 4.3.14, where Origen cites the example of the Apostle Paul. Although persistent and diligent, aided and inspired by the Holy Ghost itself, Paul could only conclude that *the judgements of God are unsearchable and his ways past finding out* (Romans 11.33). Such is the transcendence of God that the theological enterprise is necessarily doomed to failure.<sup>284</sup>

(10.3)

Having accepted that God is a transcendent and unknowable being, Origen was obliged to develop a doctrine of mediation and delegation to explain both the original creation of the world and all subsequent providential control. For Origen, as for the Apologists, it is the Logos who performs the crucial tasks of creation and providence. Origen's doctrine of mediation and delegation is very obvious in the first two books of the *Commentary on St John*. Basing his argument upon a detailed exegesis of the first verses of the fourth Gospel, Origen argues that it is the Logos and not the Father who is the direct and immediate creator of the physical world. The task of creation is delegated to a lesser being.<sup>285</sup> But although the Logos is the actual creator, Origen is keen to stress that he is simply the tool through whom the Father works. Commenting on John 1.3, Origen develops a careful 'metaphysics of prepositions'. He argues that the world is created 'by' (ὑπὸ) the Father and only 'through' (διὰ) the Son. In Aristotelian terms, the Father is the efficient cause and the Son is merely the instrumental cause.<sup>286</sup> It is particularly important to note how Origen emphasizes the superiority of the Father, as mightier (κρείττων) and greater (μείζων) than the Son: οὕτω τοίνυν καὶ ἐνθάδε εἰ πάντα διὰ τοῦ λόγου ἐγένετο, οὐχ ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου ἐγένετο, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ κρείττονος καὶ μείζονος παρὰ τὸν λόγον. τίς δ' ἂν ἄλλος οὗτος τυγχάνῃ ἢ ὁ πατήρ (*Commentary on St John* 2.10 (6)). Similarly, at *Commentary on St John* 2.14 (8), Origen argues that while the Son 'makes' (ποιεῖν) and 'furnishes' (κατασκευάζειν)

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in attempt to correct this doctrine that Gregory of Nyssa proposed that God was infinitely 'knowable': if there is always more to learn, souls cannot become bored or sated. On this, see Sorabji (1983), p.151.

<sup>282</sup> This is the *via analogiae*, already popular with pagan theologians (see, for example, Albinus *Handbook* 10). For a brief discussion, see Crouzel and Simonetti (1978), p.24.

<sup>283</sup> For more on this point, see sections 1.2 and 12.1.

<sup>284</sup> On this point, see Dillon (1988), pp.223, 225, 228-229.

<sup>285</sup> de Faye (1923), III, p.40-41: "Origène ne peut concevoir Dieu manipulant la matière, façonnant le Cosmos de ses mains . . . le rôle effectif du Demiurge est dévolu ou délégué au Logos." See also Lowry (1936), p.230.

<sup>286</sup> On this particular point and for a useful discussion of the 'metaphysics of prepositions', see Dillon (1992), p.15. Bostock (1992), p.259 also notes that the Son is merely the 'instrumental cause'.

the world, it is the Father who is the real creator. It is the Father who 'acts' (ἐνεργεῖν), who is, once again, the 'efficient cause'. Quoting Psalm 33.9 – *he spoke and they were made; he commanded and they stood firm* – Origen imagines God the Father 'ordering' the Son to create the world: "ἐνετείλατο" γὰρ ὁ ἀγέννητος θεὸς τῷ πρωτοτόκῳ πάσης κτίσεως "καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν". For this reason, the Logos is described as the Father's servant: ὅτι ὑπηρέτης . . . γενόμενος ὁ λόγος τὸν κόσμον κατεσκεύασε.

It could thus be argued that Origen's Demiurge is even more inferior and more subordinate than the Demiurge of contemporary pagan philosophy. The Demiurge of Albinus and the others has *carte blanche* to create what and how he likes. The First God of Middle-Platonism has no interest whatsoever in creation and is probably unaware that it is even taking place. In Origen's scheme, by contrast, the Father is still in ultimate control: he tells the Son what and how to create. It is the Father who has all the creatorial initiative. The Demiurge is the mere workman who obeys the orders of his superior.

In describing the creation of the world, Origen makes frequent use of the Platonic doctrine of a pre-existent plan, the eidetic blueprint of the future creation. Like a boat-builder or architect, the creator of the universe works according to a plan.<sup>287</sup> This plan is identified with the κόσμος νοητός, the world of the forms.<sup>288</sup> It should be noted however that it is the Father who created the forms and who then orders the Son to create according to this plan: καὶ λεκτέον ὅτι κτίσας, ἴν' οὕτως εἶπω, ἔμψυχον σοφίαν ὁ θεός, αὐτῇ ἐπέτρεψεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ τύπων τοῖς οὖσι καὶ τῇ ὕλῃ παρασχεῖν καὶ τὴν πλάσιν καὶ τὰ εἶδη, ἐγὼ δὲ ἐφίστημι εἰ καὶ τὰς οὐσίας (*Commentary on St John* 1.19 (22)). The key word in this passage is ἐπέτρεψεν: the Father *entrusts* the task of creation to the Son.

There is a similar paradigm of creation developed in the *Contra Celsum*. At *Contra Celsum* 6.60, Origen argues that, although it is the Son who actually creates, it is the Father who orders him to do so and who is therefore the 'primary creator':

λέγοντες τὸν μὲν προσεχῶς δημιουργὸν εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ λόγον καὶ ὡσπερὶ αὐτουργὸν τοῦ κόσμου, τὸν δὲ πατέρα τοῦ λόγου τῷ προσεταχέναι τῷ υἱῷ ἑαυτοῦ λόγῳ ποιῆσαι τὸν κόσμον εἶναι πρῶτως δημιουργόν.

At *Contra Celsum* 2.9, Origen likewise describes creation in terms of the Father *ordering* the Son. When, for example, the Lord says *Let us make man in our own image* (Genesis 1.3) – we are to

<sup>287</sup> See, for example, *Commentary on St John* 1.19 (22).

<sup>288</sup> The Platonic original for this theory is the *Timaeus*, a dialogue which Origen knew well.

understand a collaborative creation in which the Son obeys the orders and commands of his Father: και' τούτω εἰρηκέναι τό· "ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν ἡμετέραν".

προσταχθέντα δὲ τὸν λόγον πεποιηκέναι πάντα, ὅσα ὁ πατήρ αὐτῷ ἐνετείλατο. Origen quotes the famous verse – *He spoke and they were made; he commanded and they stood firm* (Psalm 33.9) in support of his general theory of creation: God *speaks* to the Son, who obeys his commands and creates the world.<sup>289</sup> These ideas are repeated almost verbatim at *Contra Celsum* 2.31, where Origen summarizes the arguments of the previous chapters:

ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἐνετείλατο περὶ τῶν τοσούτων ἐν κόσμῳ, καὶ ἐκτίσθη, καὶ ὅτι ὁ τὴν ἐντολὴν λαβὼν ὁ θεὸς λόγος ἦν.

The subordinate status of the Son and his rôle as the mere tool through whom the Father works is epitomized in Origen's gloss on Genesis 1.3, *Let there be light*. This verse was a notorious crux in early Patristic exegesis. The controversy centred upon the precise mood of the verb. The Hebrew original (*y-hee*) was translated into Greek as γενηθήτω. This is an ambiguous form: it could be either an optative or an imperative. Tatian read the verb as an optative and was roundly condemned by both Clement and Origen for imagining the Father praying or wishing for light.<sup>290</sup> Correcting this foolish exegesis, Origen insists that the verb be read as the Father's *command* to the Son: δημιουργὸς γὰρ πῶς ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστίν, ᾧ λέγει ὁ πατήρ· "γενηθήτω φῶς" (*Commentary on St John* 1.19 (22)). We find the same exegesis at *Contra Celsum* 2.9: ἐν τῇ κατὰ Μωϋσέα κοσμοποιῖα προστάττοντα τὸν πατέρα εἰρηκέναι τό· "γενηθήτω φῶς" καὶ "γενηθήτω στερέωμα" καὶ τὰ λοιπά, ὅσα προσέταξεν ὁ θεὸς γενέσθαι.

#### THE RÔLE OF THE SON IN ORIGEN'S MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

(11.1)

The Son's rôle as a quasi Platonic intermediary is also evident in Origen's mystical theology. The Son is simply the necessary means by which and through which we reach an otherwise unreachable Father. Origen's mystical theology is Christocentric only in so far as Christ plays the vital rôles of mystagogue

<sup>289</sup> και' ταῦτα λέγομεν οὐκ αὐτοὶ ἐπιβάλλοντες ἀλλὰ ταῖς παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις φερομέναις προφητείαις πιστεύοντες· ἐν αἷς λέγεται περὶ θεοῦ καὶ τῶν δημιουργημάτων αὐταῖς λέξεσι τὰ οὕτως ἔχοντα· "ὅτι αὐτὸς εἶπε καὶ ἐγενήθησαν, αὐτὸς ἐνετείλατο καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν. εἰ γὰρ ἐνετείλατο ὁ θεός, καὶ ἐκτίσθη τὰ δημιουργήματα, τίς ἂν κατὰ τὸ ἄρεσκον τῷ προφητικῷ πνεύματι εἶη ὁ τὴν τηλικαύτην τοῦ πατρὸς ἐντολὴν ἐκπληρῶσαι δυνήεις ἢ ὁ, ἔν' οὕτως ὀνομάσω, ἔμψυχος λόγος καὶ "ἀλήθεια" τυγχάνων;

<sup>290</sup> Clement, *Eccl. Proph.* 38.1; Origen, *On Prayer* 24; *Contra Celsum* 6.51. See Chadwick's (1953) discussion *ad loc.* and Grant (1988), p.127.

and psychopomp. It is he who leads souls to God the Father. What is particularly important to the present argument is the way in which Origen repeatedly insists that the Son is merely the means to an end and not the end itself. As such, he will prove ultimately redundant, *de trop*, to the aspiring mystic who has outgrown his rather elementary help.

We have often noted that Origen's pedagogic theory is founded upon the recognition of the necessity of grading teaching according to the different abilities of different pupils and how he therefore develops a strictly hierarchical structure of learning, distinguishing sharply between the 'simple' and the 'perfect'.<sup>291</sup> Origen's Christology reflects or rather epitomizes this fundamental doctrine. A central tenet of Origen's Christology and one which would later arouse the fierce indignation of the orthodox is the claim that the Incarnation is simply a temporary pedagogic condescension. It is but the necessary means of communicating with a fallen race unable, *as yet*, to contemplate God as God and therefore requiring the preliminary revelation of God as Man.<sup>292</sup> This figure of Jesus of Nazareth remains useful to the intellectually and spiritually naïve, to the *simpliciores* of Origen's urban congregations.<sup>293</sup> It is with them in mind that Origen devotes so many of his Homilies to an elaboration of the earthly life of Jesus and to glorifying, with St Paul, the person of Christ Crucified.<sup>294</sup> For the élite of the Church, however, it is possible – indeed necessary – to transcend this preliminary stage. They must strive to see behind the veil of flesh and begin to contemplate God as God and not God as Man. According to Origen, the Incarnation has absolutely no permanent or intrinsic importance: it is merely the first step on the ladder.<sup>295</sup> The mature Christian will pass beyond this first stage and come to contemplate Christ stripped of all flesh, returned to his original, pristine and proper state as the discarnate, eternal Son of God, the Logos.<sup>296</sup>

<sup>291</sup> See Harl (1958), pp.119-123 and Bigg (1913), pp.178-84 for interesting discussions of this subject. Lebreton (1923 and 1924) and Trigg (1981) accuse Origen of preaching two distinct versions of Christianity. We discuss this subject in more detail in chapter 3, section 6.1.

<sup>292</sup> So Harl (1958), p.114: "Origène conçoit l'Incarnation comme une adaptation pédagogique de la divinité aux capacités humaines." She discusses this point in some detail in *ibid.* pp. 229-33.

<sup>293</sup> Bigg (1913), p.166 provides an interesting analysis of the kind of congregation who would have heard Origen's homilies.

<sup>294</sup> Harl (1958), p.199.

<sup>295</sup> See chapter 3, sections 5.1-7.5 for a full discussion of the fact that Origen has no understanding of the soteriological value of the Incarnation.

<sup>296</sup> Origen sees the Incarnation as a purely temporal event, lasting only 32 years. The ascended, exalted Christ has divested himself of all the dross of corporeality. Harl (1958), pp.199-200, 241 and 284 provides an interesting discussion of this important point. She quotes *Commentary on St John* 1.7 (9): τοῦ λόγου ἐπανελθόντος ἀπὸ τοῦ σεσαρκῶσθαι ἐφ' ὃ "ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν". She also refers to the treatise *On Prayer* 23.2, where Origen similarly presents the exalted Christ as divested of all humanity. Bigg (1913), p.211 does not accept that the exalted Christ is permanently divested of his humanity. We discuss this point in chapter 3, sections 5.3 and 5.4.

But not even yet has the mystic reached the final stage of the τέλειος Christian. It is Origen's belief that even the contemplation of the Logos is a stage to be transcended. The ultimate goal is contemplation of the Father. In his mystical theology, Origen clearly distinguishes the Father and the Son and ascribes to the latter a markedly subordinate rôle. The Son is simply a tool, the means by which and through which the Father might be gradually revealed. The Incarnation is the supreme example of this kind of mediation. By the assuming of human flesh, the Son sets us on the first rung of the ladder.<sup>297</sup> From this lowly, but necessary beginning, he will lead us, stage by stage, higher and higher, until we can bear the full revelation of God the Father. But when we have reached this, the final goal, the ladder will lie discarded, useless and forgotten.

(11.2)

This hierarchy of ascent is most clearly described at *Commentary on St John* 19.6. Commenting on the Lord's famous reply to St Philip – *he that hath seen me hath seen the Father* (John 14.9), Origen proceeds to describe the flight of the Christian soul and its ascent to the ultimate contemplation of God the Father. The crucial point for us to note is Origen's insistence that the Son is merely the means and not the end. The passage is long, but we quote it in full because it contains so many important points:

τῷ ἀναβαίνειν ἀπὸ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν γνώσιν τοῦ πατρὸς τὸν γινώσκοντα τὸν πατέρα, καὶ μὴ ἄλλως ὁρᾶσθαι τὸν πατέρα ἢ τῷ ὁρᾶσθαι τὸν υἱόν· ὁ γὰρ ἑωρακώς, φησὶν, ἐμὲ ἑώρακε τὸν πέμψαντά με· οὐκ ἂν δὲ εἰρήκει τὸ ὁ ἑωρακώς τὸν πατέρα ἑώρακέν με, ἐπεὶ περὶ ὁ τὸν λόγον θεωρηκώς τοῦ θεοῦ θεωρεῖ τὸν θεόν, ἀναβαίνων ἀπὸ τοῦ λόγου πρὸς τὸν θεόν· ἀμήχανον δὲ ἐστὶν μὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ λόγου θεωρῆσαι τὸν θεόν. καὶ ὁ θεωρῶν τὴν σοφίαν, ἣν ἔκτισεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ, ἀναβαίνει ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐγνωκέναι τὴν σοφίαν ἐπὶ τὸν πατέρα αὐτῆς.<sup>298</sup>

ἀδύνατον δὲ χωρὶς τῆς σοφίας προαγωγῆς νοηθῆναι τὸν τῆς σοφίας θεόν . . . καὶ τάχα γε ὥσπερ κατὰ τὸν ναὸν ἀναβαθμοὶ τινες ἦσαν, δι' ὧν εἰσῆει τις εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων, οὕτως οἱ πάντες ἡμῶν ἀναβαθμοὶ ὁ μονογενὴς ἐστὶν τοῦ θεοῦ· καὶ ὥσπερ τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν ὁ μὲν ἐστὶν πρῶτος ἐπὶ τὰ κάτω, ὁ δὲ τούτου ἀνωτέρω, καὶ οὕτως ἐφεξῆς μέχρι τοῦ ἀνωτάτω, οὕτως οἱ μὲν πάντες εἰσὶν ἀναβαθμοὶ ὁ σωτήρ· ὁ δὲ οἶον πρῶτος κατωτέρω τὸ ἀνθρώπινον αὐτοῦ, ᾧ ἐπιβαίνοντες ὁδεύομεν κατὰ τὰ ἐξῆς αὐτοῦ ὄντα τὴν πᾶσαν ἐν τοῖς ἀναβαθμοῖς ὁδόν, ὥστε ἀναβῆναι δι' αὐτοῦ ὄντος καὶ ἀγγέλου καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν δυνάμεων. καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐπινοίας δὲ αὐτοῦ, εἴπερ ἕτερόν ἐστιν ὁδὸς καὶ

<sup>297</sup> See Louth (1981), p.65 for the relevance of this doctrine in a specifically mystical context.

<sup>298</sup> c.f. *Commentary on St John* 2.23 (18), for the claim that the Father of wisdom is 'greater' than wisdom. See also our discussion of the theological issues involved in sections 5.5 and 8.2.

θύρα, προαπαντήσαι δεῖ τῇ ὁδῷ, ἵνα μετὰ ταῦτα οὕτως φθάσῃ τις ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν (*Commentary on St John* 19.6).

Surely the most natural and obvious interpretation of the verse - *he that hath seen me hath seen the Father* – would be to conclude that the Father and the Son are one and the same. Origen will not accept this reading. Indeed, he insists that the phrase - *he that hath seen me hath seen the Father* – is not the same as the phrase – *he that hath seen the Father hath seen me*. Instead, he interprets the verse as Scriptural evidence of the Son's rôle as psychopomp and mystagogue. The Son, in the guise of Wisdom, guides the mystic: ἀδύνατον δὲ χωρὶς τῆς σοφίας προαγωγῆς νοηθῆναι τὸν τῆς σοφίας θεόν. At the end of the passage, the Son is described as the steps (ἀναβαθμοί) of the Temple which lead to the Holy of Holies (the Father). Origen envisages a gradual and hierarchical ascent, through a number of carefully defined stages. The Incarnation, the assuming of human flesh, sets us on the first step. From here, we climb higher and higher until we reach the top: οἱ μὲν πάντες εἰσὶν ἀναβαθμοὶ ὁ σωτήρ· ὁ δὲ οἶον πρῶτος κατωτέρω τὸ ἀνθρώπινον αὐτοῦ, ᾧ ἐπὶ βαίνοντες ὁδεύομεν κατὰ τὰ ἐξῆς αὐτοῦ ὄντα τὴν πᾶσαν ἐν τοῖς ἀναβαθμοῖς ὁδόν. The Son is the road (ὁδός) on which we must all travel. It is in this sense that we are to understand the Saviour's response to Philip. To 'see' the Son is the crucial first stage on our quest to 'see' the Father: τῷ ἀναβαίνειν ἀπὸ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν γνῶσιν τοῦ πατρὸς τὸν γινώσκοντα τὸν πατέρα, καὶ μὴ ἄλλως ὁρᾶσθαι τὸν πατέρα ἢ τῷ ὁρᾶσθαι τὸν υἱόν. Yet Origen insists that the contemplation of the Son is not the final goal. There is an ascent – ἀναβαίνειν – from the Son to one who is much higher.

In Book 1 of the *Commentary on St John* Origen similarly argues that the Son is our only guide (ὁδηγός) to God the Father:

δύναται δὲ καὶ ὁ λόγος υἱὸς εἶναι παρὰ τὸ ἀπαγγέλλειν τὰ κρύφια τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκείνου, ἀνάλογον τῷ καλουμένῳ υἱῷ λόγῳ νοῦ τυγχάνοντος. ὥς γὰρ ὁ παρ' ἡμῖν λόγος ἄγγελός ἐστι τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦ ὁρωμένων, οὕτως ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος, ἐγνωκῶς τὸν πατέρα, οὐδενὸς τῶν γενητῶν προσβαλεῖν αὐτῷ χωρὶς ὁδηγοῦ δυναμένου, ἀποκαλύπτει ὃν ἔγνω πατέρα (*Commentary on St John* 1.38 (42)).

The Son's rôle as psychopomp is emphasized by the use of the term ἀποκαλύπτει: he is the hierophant who reveals the secrets to potential adepts. Finally, we might refer to the brief remarks made at *Commentary on St John* 19.22 (5). In this passage, Origen imagines the flight of the soul through a series of carefully defined stages. From the contemplation of the sensible, physical world, the soul turns to the contemplation of the intellectual world, the world of the forms; from there, it might make



the final leap to the contemplation of God himself (αὐτὸν ὁρᾶν τὸν θεόν). The particular point to note about this passage is the identification of the Son with the world of the forms (νοητὸς κόσμος).<sup>299</sup> Once again, Origen argues that the vision of the Son is merely the preliminary or preparatory stage for the ultimate revelation. He is the mystical guide who takes us by the hand (χειραγωγοῦσα) and leads us onwards.

(11.3).

Origen's mystical theology, particularly as developed in the *Commentary on St John*, has much in common with contemporary pagan mysticism. It is especially similar to Plotinus' description of the flight of the soul and its ascent to the One, *via* the contemplation of Intellect. Origen and Plotinus agree on two fundamental points: (1) that the Second Principle is the way and the means by which we might reach the First Principle, the necessary preliminary stage which cannot be by-passed; (2) that the Second Principle will be finally rejected and transcended in favour of the ultimate revelation of the highest reality. At *Ennead* 5.1.6, Plotinus compares the contemplation of Intellect to a pilgrim's contemplation of the images and statues in the outer precincts of a temple. The aim of course is to pass through these vestibules and enter the Inner Sanctum (the One). This image is remarkably similar to Origen's image of the High Priest leaving the outer-court of the Temple and entering the Holy of Holies. Similarly, at *Ennead* 5.9.2, Plotinus compares Intellect to the vestibule (πρόθυρον) that surrounds the dwelling of the Supreme Being and at *Ennead* 5.5.3, Intellect is likened to the ranks of officials that surround the Great King. In this last image, Plotinus emphasizes the notion of a gradual ascent, through an obvious and strict hierarchy of beings: "before the Great King in his progress there comes first the minor train, then rank by rank the greater and more exalted, closer to the King and mightier; next his own honoured company, until suddenly appears the Supreme Monarch himself" (trans. MacKenna/Dillon). As we noted in the passages discussed above, Origen has a similar understanding of a hierarchical ascent through various distinct stages. Finally, we compare *Ennead* 6.7.35, in which Plotinus again stresses that the contemplation of Intellect is simply an intermediate stage. Once intimately loved, it is cruelly rejected and dismissed in favour of its superior. Although Plotinus emphasizes that contemplation of Intellect is the necessary way and means, the *sine qua non* for the aspiring mystic, it is certainly not our final goal. With this in mind, Plotinus compares the

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<sup>299</sup> ζητήσεις δὲ εἰ κατὰ τι τῶν σημαινόμενων δύναται ὁ πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως εἶναι κόσμος, καὶ μάλιστα καθ' ὃ "σοφία" ἐστὶν ἡ πολυποικίλος.

mystic to a visitor to a country house, who immediately turns his attention from the lavish furnishings and elaborate décor as soon as the owner of the house arrives.

(11.4)

Origen's mystical theology re-iterates the Son's status as the tool or instrument through whom the Father works. Our final goal is not contemplation of the Son, but contemplation of the Father. As Louth points out, the mystic strives for union with the Son: from this position, we shall be able – *like the Son* - to contemplate the Father.<sup>300</sup> Ultimately, we shall all engage in the same illustrious activity, i.e. the contemplation and adoration of the one true God, God the Father. There are two interesting passages from the *Commentary on St John* which illustrate this important point. At *Commentary on St John* 1.16, Origen begins by claiming, once again, that it is by or through the mediation of the Son (διὰ τὸν λόγον) that we come to the final vision of the Father. He then argues that it is by engaging in the same activity as the Son that we enter into mystical union with him and become 'one Son': μία πρᾶξις ἔσται τῶν πρὸς θεὸν διὰ τὸν πρὸς αὐτὸν λόγον φθασάντων ἢ τοῦ κατανοεῖν τὸν θεόν, ἵνα γένωνται οὕτως ἐν τῇ γνώσει τοῦ πατρὸς μορφωθέντες πάντες ἀκριβῶς υἱός, ὡς νῦν μόνος ὁ υἱὸς ἔγνωκε τὸν πατέρα.<sup>301</sup>

At *Commentary on St John* 20.7, Origen likewise envisages the ultimate beatific vision as the vision of God the Father. Commenting on the verse *I tell you what I have seen in my Father's presence* (John 8.38), Origen provides an elaborate description of the consummation. He assures us that the time will come when the angels (souls of the just) will see God directly; the mediation of the Son will no longer be needed. We shall ourselves be in the Father's presence, eye-witnesses to his glory. We shall no longer concern ourselves with the Image (the Son), but with the original archetype (the Father). The important point to note is Origen's insistence that our vision of the Father will be like (ὁμοίως) the Son's; as he sees God, so shall we: ὅτε δὲ ὡς ὁ υἱὸς ὁρᾷ τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὰ παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ ὄψεται τις, οἶονεὶ ὁμοίως τῷ υἱῷ.<sup>302</sup> Once again, we see that the mystical goal is contemplation of God the Father, but that this state is utterly dependent upon prior union with the Son: it is *in* (ἐν) the Son that we see the Father.

(12.1)

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<sup>300</sup> Louth (1981), pp. 72-3.

<sup>301</sup> Passage quoted, but not discussed, by Balas (1975), p.272.

<sup>302</sup> Passage quoted by Bigg (1913), p.211.

We find a similar picture of the Son's mediatory rôle in the *de Principiis*. Here too Origen insists that, while the Son might well reveal something of God to those as yet far off, this is a temporary and preliminary training which we shall eventually transcend. As in the *Commentary on St John*, Origen insists that our final goal is the contemplation of God the Father. The task of the Son (and the Holy Ghost) is simply to train us, teach us and strengthen us until such a time as we might be able to bear the final revelation. This is very clearly expressed at *de Principiis* 1.3.8, where Origen describes the flight of the soul to God *via* the Son and the Holy Ghost: *sapientiae id opus est instruere atque erudire ea et ad perfectionem perducere ex spiritus sancti confirmatione atque indesinenti sanctificatione, per quam solam deum capere possunt*.

In the second chapter of the *de Principiis*, Origen repeatedly presents Christ as the one who reveals God. I do not accept the arguments of Bethune-Baker that the one who reveals God must necessarily be the same nature as God.<sup>303</sup> If that were the case, God would presumably be able to reveal himself. On the contrary, Origen insists that we need the mediation of a *lesser* being to reveal the enormity of God the Father. We could even say that the Son protects us from the (as yet) unbearable revelation of full divinity, by revealing it in a diluted and weaker form. Origen makes this point explicit by comparing the Father to the sun and the Son to its rays or, in the words of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, to the *brightness of eternal light* (Wisdom 7.26). In his exegesis of this verse, Origen argues that the gentle rays of the sun help weak eyes to grow gradually accustomed to brightness and finally to become strong enough to look at the sun itself. In this sense, it is correct to call brightness the 'mediator' between men and the light:

*per splendorem namque quid sit lux ipsa agnoscitur et sentitur. qui splendor fragilibus se et infirmis mortalium oculis placidius ac lenius offerens et paulatim velut edocens et adsuescens claritatem luminis pati . . . capaces eos efficit ad suscipiendam gloriam lucis, etiam in hoc velut quidam mediator hominum ac lucis effectus (de Principiis 1.2.7).*

In the following chapter, Origen repeats the idea that we might begin to understand light by understanding its brightness. He is careful to point out however that this is only a preliminary exercise (*de Principiis* 1.2.8). Origen had used this same image in chapter 1.1.5-6, similarly arguing that weak eyes which cannot bear to look directly at the sun can nevertheless learn much by contemplating its

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<sup>303</sup> Bethune-Baker (1933), p.147.

brightness, filtered, if necessary, through a window.<sup>304</sup> In this chapter, Origen stresses the inferior status of the sun's rays and distinguishes them sharply from the *substantia ac natura* of the sun itself. The implication is that by understanding the Son, we understand merely the δυνάμεις of God and not his οὐσία.<sup>305</sup>

The Son is able to fulfil his crucial task of mediation because he is *similar* to the Father at the same time as being markedly *inferior*. The image of the sun and its rays illustrates both these criteria. While the rays of light are obviously similar to the sun, they are equally obviously inferior to it. We have already seen how Plotinus compares the first and second hypostases to the sun and its rays.<sup>306</sup> Like Origen, Plotinus argues that the rays are similar (ὁμοιόν) to the sun, but ontologically inferior (ἐλαττον): it is precisely for this reason that 'the sun's rays tell of the sun' (*Ennead* 5.1.7. trans. MacKenna/Dillon).<sup>307</sup> The ubiquitous image of the sun and its rays in both Origen and Plotinus clearly illustrates the subordination of the Second Principle and its subsequent rôle as intermediary.

The famous image of the two statues (*de Principiis* 1.2.8) carries the same implication. While the enormity of God the Father is beyond our ken (a statue so large as to be imperceptible), we can nevertheless learn much about him by contemplating the Son (an exact copy of the first statue, but far smaller). Rufinus has altered the original argument of this passage, by implying that the image of the smaller statue refers simply to the Incarnation and kenosis.<sup>308</sup> This is an obvious emendation. This chapter is devoted to the Son's pre-carnate and eternal nature; discussions of the Incarnation are reserved for a later stage (*de Principiis* 2.6). Origen does not explain the Son's mediatory function *solely* in terms of the Incarnation.<sup>309</sup> Of course in the theology of the New Testament, St Paul argues that it is only because the Son has become man that he can be a successful advocate with the Father.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> As Dillon (1988), pp.220, 222-226 points out, these passages are likely to have been inspired by the image of the cave in the *Republic*, in which Plato describes a similar ascent from contemplating rays of light to contemplating the sun itself.

<sup>305</sup> On this point, see sections 1.2 and 10.2.

<sup>306</sup> See section 2.1.

<sup>307</sup> See also, *Ennead* 5.3.12, 6.8.18.

<sup>308</sup> Jerome (*Letter to Avitus* 2) has preserved the original version. It seems odd that Edwards (2002), p.72 should accept the Rufinian version.

<sup>309</sup> As Edwards (2002), p.72 argues.

<sup>310</sup> See, for example, I Timothy 2.5: *There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*. On this point, see Forrest (2000), pp.133-4 and our chapter 3, section 5.3.

Such arguments have no place in Origen's theological scheme. It is not the Son's *incarnate* nature that explains his position as mediator, but his eternal status as a necessarily inferior being.<sup>311</sup>

We have already seen how Origen explains the Johannine *ἐπίνοια* of Christ the Word in the *Commentary on St John*.<sup>312</sup> Origen repeats this exegesis in the *de Principiis*: the Logos is cast in the guise of the divine messenger, reporting and revealing the deepest mysteries of God. As the spoken word reveals the secrets of the mind, so the Son reveals the *arcana* of God. He is the interpreter of the secrets of the divine mind – *quia sit arcanorum mentis interpres* (*de Principiis* 1.2.3). At *de Principiis* 1.2.7, Christ is explicitly described as the mediator between God and man. Fallen man is unable to understand the highest mysteries of theology and requires a skilful interpreter: *quomodo verbum sit arcana sapientiae mysteria interpretans ac proferens rationabili creaturae*. The Son, *qua* Word, is God's means of communicating with his creation: he 'makes God understood and known' (*intellegi atque agnosci facit deum* (*ibid* 1.2.8)).

#### SUBORDINATIONISM: CONCLUSION

(13)

We have seen therefore that in Origen's Trinitarian scheme the rôle and function of the Son is thoroughly and obviously subordinate. Origen accepted the fundamental credo of his pagan *confrères* that the transcendence of the first God necessitated the existence of an inferior God, to whom the workmanlike tasks of creation and providence could be delegated and who could act as the crucial intermediary or necessary conduit between the First Principle and the world of men. We have also seen how Origen's adoption of the Platonic schemes of participation and contemplation epitomizes the dependent and contingent status of the Son, as one who is eternally 'in need' of the Father and who is, moreover, but a weak copy of genuine goodness and genuine divinity.

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<sup>311</sup> Of course we do not deny that the Incarnation is a crucially important pedagogic convenience. Yet this veiling or diluting of divinity is merely an intense and magnified version of the Son's eternal status as mediator and pedagogue.

<sup>312</sup> See *Commentary on St John* 1.38 (42) (discussed above, section 8.2).

## CONCLUSION

We began this study by pointing out the crucially important paradigm shift of the eternal generation of the Son. In preaching the eternal generation of the Son, Origen made a conscious and definitive rejection of the old Apologist paradigm of the two-stage Logos and paved the way for the great theological triumphs of the following century. Origen was the first genuinely Trinitarian theologian, in that he was the first to recognize the contribution of the Son and the Holy Ghost to the fullness of divine life. No longer are these two to be seen as temporary economic necessities: they are finally admitted as permanent and fundamental members of the Godhead. Without the eternal existence of the Son and the Holy Ghost, God would lack essential attributes of his divinity.

We then attempted to discover the reason for this great paradigm shift. Why was Origen dissatisfied with the ubiquitous doctrine of his predecessors? What prompted this momentous innovation? We found the answer to these important questions in Origen's debate with the Monarchians, in his desperation to distinguish as far as possible the three persons of the Trinity.<sup>313</sup> It is within this polemical context that we can best understand Origen's doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. The Apologist doctrine of the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος, the Logos eternally imminent within the Father, seemed too worryingly close to Monarchian unitarianism. In order to refute the heretics, Origen was obliged to develop an alternative paradigm, in which the Father, Son and Holy Ghost could be eternally distinct from one another.

Our analysis of passages from the *Commentary on Ephesians*, the *Commentary on St John* and the *de Principiis* revealed how Origen responded to the Monarchian threat by insisting that Father, Son and Holy Ghost were three separate and individual οὐσίαι/ὑποστάσεις, eternally different from one another. Although the Son is to be identified with the essential divine attributes of will, wisdom, reason and power, Origen will not accept that these remain mere attributes of the Father: they are eternally hypostasized as a separate οὐσία/ὑπόστασις. We then saw how it is common scholarly practice to interpret these claims as implying merely the personal or numerical distinction between the three persons of the Trinity and how Origen must therefore be hailed as a Nicene theologian *avant l'heure*. The crux of this argument hinges upon the interpretation of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις as 'primary οὐσία', the equivalent of 'person' in the orthodox theology of the following century.

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<sup>313</sup> Without of course resorting to Adoptionism.

We utterly rejected this argument. From a thorough study of the uses of these crucial terms elsewhere in Origen's oeuvre, we were able to conclude that Origen almost always uses οὐσία and ὑπόστασις to mean 'nature' or 'substance'. To claim that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are different οὐσίαι or that they are τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις meant far more than a numerical or personal distinction. It meant that they were different substances or different natures. This conclusion was corroborated by a further examination of passages from the *Commentary on St John* and elsewhere, in which Origen refutes the Monarchians by describing a strictly hierarchical Trinity.

Although the refutation of Monarchianism was the impetus for much of Origen's Trinitarian theology, his counter claims were not to be seen as purely and simply the refutation of Monarchianism, i.e. as the bald assertion of a mere numerical distinction. Despite existing eternally, the Son and the Holy Ghost are certainly not of equal status to the Father. Indeed, subordinationism is a central aspect of Origen's Trinitarian system: disparity of nature and of rank is necessary for the preservation of the transcendence of God the Father.

In the second half of this chapter, we saw how Origen's Trinitarian theology owed a very great deal to traditional Platonic ontology. It was particularly similar to the system of three hypostases developed by Plotinus in the *Enneads*. We revealed how Origen constantly stresses the dependent and contingent nature of the Son, how he relies absolutely on the Father for every moment of his existence. As such, the Son is a necessarily inferior being. Finally, we saw how Origen exploits the fact of the Son's inferior status: he becomes the tool or servant of the Father, the 'second God' to whom the workmanlike tasks of creation, providence, redemption and revelation can safely be delegated.

Such stark subordinationism is far indeed from the orthodox Trinitarian theology of the fourth century. Those scholars who hail Origen as a precocious precursor of Nicaea, allowing only a numerical distinction between the persons of the Trinity, are guilty of a blatant anachronism. They are projecting the concerns of a much later debate onto an entirely different historical and theological situation. In particular, they have failed to take adequate cognisance of the polemical milieu in which Origen forged his new theology. As we have seen, Origen's major doctrinal opponents were the Monarchians. In response to them, Origen must stress as far as possible the distinction between the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. He had no need and no desire to assert their equality. It would be another fifty years, prompted by the exigencies of the Arian Controversy, before theologians would feel the need for this,

the next great paradigm shift. For the moment, Origen's notion of a hierarchical Trinity was a sufficient and satisfactory model.

In our introduction, we emphasized Origen's rôle as inquisitor and the zeal for orthodoxy which inspired his whole career. This chapter has proved that he succeeded in very many of his polemical aims. Origen's refutation of Monarchianism must surely be hailed as a triumph of Christian theology. Indeed, from even a cursory glance at the theology of his immediate successors, we can see that his solutions were adopted with great gusto by his co-religionists.<sup>314</sup> It is Origen's great misfortune to have developed doctrines which were, in their own time, helpful and useful tools in the endless battle against heresy and which would surely have so remained, were it not for the ravages of later heresies forcing a more precise and rigorous theology and necessitating a merciless witch-hunt and posthumous excommunication of any who had inadvertently failed to meet the new, exacting standards of orthodoxy. For example, although Origen's wholesale defence of free-will was originally welcomed as a fine refutation of the more extreme versions of Gnostic determinism and although it was later seized upon as the perfect *riposte* to the predestinarians of the fourth century,<sup>315</sup> it was eventually condemned and anathematized as a dangerous proto-Pelagianism.<sup>316</sup> The same fate befell Origen's Trinitarian doctrine. Although it was originally welcomed as a clever and sincere refutation of Monarchianism and immediately adopted by the Eastern Church, it would later be utterly rejected as a dangerous proto-Arianism. The sorry history of Origen's reputation within the Church thus epitomizes Holloway's thesis of the theological paradigm shift.<sup>317</sup> New problems require new solutions and theological paradigms are in need of constant revision. As the historical, social and theological context changes, so too must theology. Theology is a discipline particularly sensitive to external stimuli.

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<sup>314</sup> For a brief overview of this, see Kelly (1956), pp.158-161.

<sup>315</sup> Rufinus translated the *de Principiis* at the request of a certain Macarius, who believed that Origen's doctrines would prove to be the perfect refutation of the *mathematici* (the determinists). See Amacker and Junod (2002), pp.9-14 and Bardy (1923), pp.90-92.

<sup>316</sup> Bigg (1913), p.323.

<sup>317</sup> As described in the Introduction.



## DID ORIGEN APPLY THE TERM ὁμοούσιος TO THE SON?

### INTRODUCTION.

With all the above in mind, we can now turn to that perennial problem for Origenists, did Origen apply the word ὁμοούσιος to the Son? The only evidence that we have for Origen's use of the word in a Trinitarian context is Rufinus' Latin version<sup>1</sup> of Pamphilus' quotation from the otherwise lost *Commentary on Hebrews*.<sup>2</sup> The supposed quotation is preserved in the first chapter of Pamphilus' *Apology for Origen*. The *Apology* was written between 308 and 310 and was translated into Latin in 397.<sup>3</sup> It is a point by point response to various contemporary criticisms and accusations of heresy. Much of Origen's theology aroused suspicion almost as soon as it was written.<sup>4</sup> As early as the 290s, Methodius of Olympus poured scorn on Origen's doctrine of creation and his attitude to corporeal Resurrection.<sup>5</sup> By the beginning of the fourth century, Origen was under almost constant attack. Pamphilus (with the partial collaboration of Eusebius)<sup>6</sup> decided that it was time to respond to these criticisms and to rescue Origen from posthumous infamy. The *Apology for Origen* is Pamphilus' attempt to prove that Origen was a faithful son of the Church and that his various critics have misunderstood and misinterpreted the central doctrines of his theological system. After a lengthy introduction to Origen's theology, Pamphilus responds to ten specific accusations. His response takes the form of quotations from Origen, annotated with various parenthetical explanations.

The first accusation dealt with by Pamphilus is that Origen believed the Son to be *innatus*. The ferocity and fame of Jerome's attacks and the success of Justinian's anathemas have tended to highlight the charge that Origen was an heretical precursor of Arius, that he believed the Son to be a mere creature. But in the decade before Arius began his momentous career, Origen was apparently being accused of the opposite of the more familiar charge. Pamphilus, writing at the beginning of the fourth century, had noticed that various people were accusing Origen of believing that the Son, like the Father, was unbegotten. This is of course the heresy of ditheism. Pamphilus is keen to refute what he sees as a

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<sup>1</sup> The original Greek is entirely perished.

<sup>2</sup> Stead (1977), p.212 states categorically that the term (as applied to the Father and the Son) is not found anywhere else in the surviving Greek texts of Origen's writings. Its use is attested in various catena fragments, but Edwards (1998), p.658 is rightly scathing of their authenticity.

<sup>3</sup> On the dating of the work, see Amacker and Junod (2002), pp.21-4 and 45-52.

<sup>4</sup> Murphy (1945), p.65.

<sup>5</sup> See Methodius, *de Creatis* and *de Resurrectione*.

dangerous and presumably wide-spread accusation. Hanson suggests that the basis for this charge was Origen's doctrine of eternal generation.<sup>7</sup> At this date, many traditionalists within the Church were still clinging to the old Apologist doctrine of the two-stage Logos, according to which the procession of the Son was an obvious temporal event. To argue that the Son was co-eternal with the Father could easily seem to imply that he was unbegotten and that there were therefore *duo principia*.

In his general introduction to Origen's theological system, Pamphilus insists that his master did not believe that there were *duo principia*. He pre-empts the first accusation of the main *Apology* by explicitly denying that Origen believed the Son to be *innatus*. To prove the point, he provides a quotation from the *Commentary on Hebrews*. In this passage, *Wisdom 7.26* is quoted as clear Scriptural proof of the Son's dependence upon the Father. Origen begins by identifying the 'eternal light' referred to by Solomon as the Father and the Son as its 'brightness'. There follows a brief discussion of the doctrine of eternal generation: as the sun cannot exist without light, so the Father cannot exist without the Son.<sup>8</sup> Origen then argues that, as 'the brightness of eternal light', the Son was obviously 'born from' (*natus ex*) the Father and not unbegotten (*innatus*):

*erat autem non, sicut de aeterna luce diximus, innatus, ne duo principia lucis videamus inducere, sed sicut ingenitae lucis splendor, ipsam illam lucem initium habens ac fontem, natus quidem ex ipsa* (*Apologia 50*).

The metaphor of light and brightness illustrates the derivative status of the Son: he is clearly not *innatus*. In this exegesis, there is a careful distinction between the unbegotten (*innatus*) Father and the begotten (*natus*) Son. While the Father is independent and self-sufficient, the Son is utterly reliant upon his Father as the origin (*initium*) and source (*fons*) of his whole being.<sup>9</sup>

Pamphilus returns to this important subject in the main *Apology*. He begins his response to the *innatus* charge by quoting from the *Commentary on Romans*: the Son, *qua* 'love', must come 'from God' (*ex Deo*), because 'love is from God'<sup>10</sup> (*Apologia 89*). Two passages from the *Commentary on St John* show that Origen believed the only-begotten Son of God to be entirely different from those other 'sons

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<sup>6</sup> For a useful discussion of the controversy concerning authorship see Amacker and Junod (2002), pp.21-4 and 45-52

<sup>7</sup> Hanson (1985), p.66. Stead (1977), p.211 agrees.

<sup>8</sup> For similar remarks, see *de Principiis* 1.2.4, 1.2.7, 4.4.1 and *Homilies on Jeremiah* 9.4. See also our discussion of this metaphor in chapter 1, section 2.1.

<sup>9</sup> Williams (1993), p.155 is scathing of this passage and suspects the hand of Rufinus. I believe that it is almost undoubtedly genuine. The thrust of the exegesis is quintessentially Origenist. At *Homilies on Jeremiah* 9.4, for example, Origen makes very similar use of the light/brightness metaphor as an illustration of the generation of the Son.

of God' spoken of in the Bible. Christ is the Son of God by nature and not merely by adoption: only he is *ex Patre natus* (*Apologia* 91 and 93). A short quotation from the *Commentary on Hebrews* attacks those who are ashamed to admit that the Son of God is God. Origen responds by pointing out that the Son is greater than any creature in *genus, species, substantia, natura* and in all other ways (*Apologia* 95).<sup>11</sup> But it is the last passage that has aroused such interest and has encouraged such an enormous amount of scholarly debate.

This passage is also presented as a quotation from the *Commentary on Hebrews*. It takes the form of a brief exegesis of Hebrews 1.3, the Apostle's claim that the Son is the *brightness of God's glory*, and Wisdom 7.25, Solomon's description of Wisdom as *the breath of the power of God, and a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty*. Origen often juxtaposes these two verses;<sup>12</sup> it is not surprising that he takes the opportunity of a commentary on Hebrews to offer an interpretation of the famous Old Testament verse.<sup>13</sup> After a brief *caveat* on the dangers of applying corporeal metaphors to the Trinity, Origen proceeds to compare the way in which vapour emanates from a solid body to the way in which the Son emanates from the Father. The comparison leads to the famous conclusion that, as vapour is ὁμοούσιος with that from which it emanates, so the Son is ὁμοούσιος with the Father. Let us quote the passage in full:

*cum autem discutitur hec quod dictum est de Filio Dei, quod sit splendor gloriae, necessario videtur simul disserendum et illud quod dictum est, non solum quod splendor est lucis aeternae, sed et quod huic simile in Sapientia Solomonis referetur, in qua seipsam Sapientia describit dicens: vapor enim est virtutis Dei, et aporrhoea gloriae Omnipotentis purissima . . . secundum similitudinem eius vaporis qui de substantia aliqua corporea procedit, sic etiam ipse ut quidam vapor exoritur de virtute ipsius Dei: sic et sapientia ex eo procedens, ex ipsa Dei substantia generatur. sic nihilominus et secundum similitudinem corporalis aporrhœæ, esse dicitur aporrhœa gloriae omnipotentis pura quaedam et sincera. quae utraeque similitudines manifestissime ostendunt communionem substantiae esse Filio cum Patre. aporrhoea enim ὁμοούσιος videtur, id est unius substantiae cum illo corpore ex quo est aporrhoea vel vapor (*Apologia* 97-99).*

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<sup>10</sup> I John 4.7.

<sup>11</sup> We return to this important passage in section 5.

<sup>12</sup> See *Contra Celsum* 5.10, 7.17, 8.14; *Commentary on St John* 13.25; *Homilies on Jeremiah* 9.4 and *de Principiis* 1.2.6.

<sup>13</sup> Any exegesis of the Epistle to the Hebrews would naturally and almost inevitably include lengthy comments on the Wisdom of Solomon. This is because Hebrews 1.3 is an overt allusion to Wisdom 7.25 (So, Bruce (1990), pp.47-8).

What are we to make of this passage? Do we have evidence here of Origen's precocious anticipation of fourth century orthodoxy, a flash of insight into the mysteries of Trinitarian theology? Or is the passage simply an example of Rufinus' famous emendations of the texts he translated, the foisting of a spurious and anachronistic orthodoxy on his beloved master? Even amongst experts, opinion is divided concerning the authenticity of this fragment. Edwards, in a fresh look at the perennial problem, suggests that there are five main points at issue.<sup>14</sup>

1. Rufinus' method of translation.
2. The importance of the ὁμοούσιος claim in late fourth century Trinitarian controversies.
3. The relevance of the ὁμοούσιος claim to the charge that Origen believed the Son to be *innatus*.
4. The relationship of the ὁμοούσιος claim to Origen's overall theology.
5. The attitude of Origen's immediate successors and disciples to the term ὁμοούσιος.

I fully accept the importance and relevance of each of these points in assessing the authenticity of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment. I shall deal with each in turn. I am convinced of the great importance of a thorough investigation of this question. The subject is not simply an investigation into the history of textual traditions, nor an irrelevant discursus on the scholarly probity of Pamphilus and Rufinus. I believe that it is by a detailed discussion of the ὁμοούσιος claim that we can most clearly understand the central aspects of Origen's Trinitarian theology. This controversial passage from the *Apology* will thus become the perfect entrée into the very heart of the present project.

#### RUFINUS' METHOD OF TRANSLATION

##### (1.1)

It is well known that Rufinus often altered the text, as he received it, when he translated the works of Origen from Greek into Latin. Indeed, he happily admits to doing so. The justification for this wholesale emendation is explained in the work *de adulteratione librorum Origenis*: anything heretical must be an interpolation.<sup>15</sup> Rufinus argues that over the years Origen's writings had been repeatedly and systematically altered by heretics.<sup>16</sup> He seizes upon the fact that Origen apparently contradicts

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<sup>14</sup> Edwards (1998), p.660.

<sup>15</sup> The *de adulteratione* was written in Rome in c.397 and attached, as a preface, to Rufinus' translation of the *de Principiis*. For brief discussions of the form, content and circumstances of its composition, see Bardy (1923), pp.92-3, Murphy (1945), pp.83-89 and Amacker and Junod (2002), pp. 25-31.

<sup>16</sup> Cadiou (1923), p.19 suggests a possible motivation behind this kind of interpolation, namely to promote heresies under the auspices of a famous name.

himself as sufficient proof of textual corruption (*de adult.* 1.33).<sup>17</sup> Rufinus even claims that these heretics were at work during Origen's lifetime: he quotes a letter, supposedly written by Origen himself to his friends in Alexandria, in which he complains of exactly this kind of tampering (*de adult.* 7).<sup>18</sup> Rufinus bolsters his claim by citing other writers whose works had been similarly doctored, namely Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Denys of Alexandria, Hilary of Poitiers and even St Paul.<sup>19</sup> Rufinus took it upon himself to remove these malevolent additions and to recover the original and, of course, orthodox doctrines of his great hero.

To be fair to Rufinus, we must point out that he had no comprehension of the development of Christian doctrine.<sup>20</sup> He supposed that the orthodox faithful had always and would always believe the same thing.<sup>21</sup> The Nicene Creed, for example, was seen as simply the codification and ratification of the beliefs of the Apostles themselves.<sup>22</sup> With this firm belief in continuity and tradition, Rufinus could not accept that Origen was anything other than a Nicene, *avant l'heure*. Any statement that appeared to deviate from orthodox doctrine must be an interpolation. We must accept therefore that Rufinus genuinely believed that he was correcting the texts of Origen, excising malicious interpolation and recovering the *ipsissima verba* of his master.<sup>23</sup>

What is particularly important for us in our assessment of the authenticity of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment is that Rufinus admits to being particularly heavy handed with passages that dealt with the controversial subject of the Trinity.<sup>24</sup> In the Preface to his translation of the *de Principiis*, Rufinus discusses exactly this kind of emendation: *sicubi ergo nos in libris eius aliquid contra id invenimus, quod ab ipso in ceteris locis pie de Trinitate fuerat definitum, velut adulteratum hoc et*

<sup>17</sup> Rufinus quotes a controversial passage from the *de Principiis* in which Origen claims (a) that the Father and Son are *unius substantiae* and (b) that they are *alterius substantiae*. See section 2.4 for our discussion of Rufinus' claims.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of this letter, see Bardy (1923), pp.15-20, Murphy (1945), pp.85-6 and Amacker and Junod (2002), p.26. The letter is known only in Rufinus' Latin version. There is some debate as to its authenticity. Jerome accuses Rufinus of twisting the original sense (*Apologia contra Rufinum* 2.18) and Bardy admits that a few passages are 'fictive' and 'imaginaire.'

<sup>19</sup> Gamble (1941), p.83 points out how easy it was for writers in the ancient world to lose control of their work, when each copy was made by hand. Murphy (1945), p.67 believes that this kind of literary fraud was 'almost unbelievably widespread'. That is to say, the interpolation of Origen's works by heretics is certainly possible, even likely.

<sup>20</sup> As described in the Introduction (ii) to chapter 1.

<sup>21</sup> See Rufinus, *Expositio Symboli* 2 for a clear statement of this belief.

<sup>22</sup> This belief in doctrinal continuity was of course a Patristic topos. So, Meijering (1968), p.129 and Williams (1993), p.167.

<sup>23</sup> Murphy (1945), pp.102-103.

<sup>24</sup> Bardy (1923), pp.24 -132 discusses this topic and provides all the relevant quotations. He concludes that "c'est surtout la Trinité que Rufin entend l'adapter, et l'on comprend ses motifs, puisque de tous

*alienum aut praetermisimus aut secundum eam regulam protulimus, quam ab ipso frequenter invenimus adfirmatem.* Although Rufinus excuses this practice by claiming to know of other passages (*ceteris locis*) in which Origen espouses the orthodox position, Jerome for one is not convinced. He argues that Rufinus has altered the original text to suit the ears of a critical, pro-Nicene readership: *quae* (scil. Rufinus' translation of the *de Principiis*) *cum legissem contulisseque cum graeco, ilico animadvert quae Origenes de Patre et Filio et Spiritu Sancto impie dixerat et quae romanae aures ferre non poterant in meliorem partem ab interprete commutata* (Jerome, *Apologia contra Rufinum* 1.6). Jerome goes on to say that Rufinus has taken the same liberties with the Greek text of the *Apology*: anything heretical has been overtly and systematically altered.<sup>25</sup>

(1.2)

The detection of these well-meant corrections is of course an extremely difficult task. We are sometimes able to compare the translations of Rufinus with those of Jerome<sup>26</sup> or with the Greek fragments preserved by Gregory and Basil in the *Philocalia*<sup>27</sup> and by the Emperor Justinian in his two attacks on Origen and Origenism.<sup>28</sup> But great care is needed. First, it must be remembered that Jerome was a far from impartial translator of Origen.<sup>29</sup> He realized that his precarious position within the Church depended to a very large extent upon supporting the accusations levelled at Origen by Epiphanius and his influential associates.<sup>30</sup> Jerome's response to this First Origenist Controversy<sup>31</sup> was to join in the attacks on his erstwhile hero. Moreover, as Bardy has observed, Jerome was probably unable to detect the delicate *nuances* of Origen's more speculative doctrines: quite often, he simply

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les dogmes chrétiens c'est celui de la Trinité qui a été le plus complètement élucidé au cours du 4<sup>ème</sup> siècle."

<sup>25</sup> *paucisque testimoniis de Filio et Spiritu Sancto commutatis, quae sciebas displicere Romanis* (Jerome, *Apologia contra Rufinum* 1.6); *de Eusebii libro multa subtraxerit et in bonam partem de Filio et Spiritu Sancto nisus sit commutare* (ibid. 2.15); *immutatis dumtaxat sensibus de Filio et Spiritu Sancto qui apertam blasphemiam praeferabant* (ibid. 2.23).

<sup>26</sup> Although the full text of Jerome's translation of the *de Principiis* is now lost, substantial fragments are preserved in his letters and in his various attacks on John of Jerusalem and Rufinus.

<sup>27</sup> The *Philocalia* is a fourth century florilegium of Origen's writings.

<sup>28</sup> In 543, Justinian wrote a lengthy letter to Mennas, Patriarch of Constantinople, condemning Origen: the letter contains various quotations from the *de Principiis* and a list of 10 anathemas. In 553, Origen was formally condemned at the Council of Constantinople. Fragments of the *de Principiis* are preserved in the fifteen anathemas of the Council. For a full discussion of the historical circumstances surrounding these two attacks, see Bardy (1923), pp. 48-53.

<sup>29</sup> We are of course referring to the second phase of Jerome's translating career. The young Jerome, translator of Origen's innocuous Homilies and Commentaries, had no polemical axe to grind. On the question of comparing Jerome's translations with those of Rufinus, see Scott (1991), p.71.

<sup>30</sup> For a full discussion of Epiphanius' attacks on Origen and the effects of these attacks on both Jerome and Rufinus, see section 2.

<sup>31</sup> The terms "First Origenist Controversy" and "Second Origenist Controversy" are taken from Clark (1992). They refer to the Jerome-Rufinus debate and Justinian's condemnations respectively.

missed the point.<sup>32</sup> The fragments preserved by Gregory and Basil are of much greater value, insofar as their authenticity is beyond doubt. Much useful work has been done, particularly by John Rist, comparing Rufinus' translations with the Greek text preserved by the Cappadocians.<sup>33</sup> Yet, as Bardy points out,<sup>34</sup> the brothers selected only those passages of undeniable orthodoxy for their collection. For example, they deal in great detail with the question of free-will and determinism. But there would have been no need for Rufinus to alter a text which dealt with such harmless subjects. It is hardly surprising to discover that the Latin version of *de Principiis* 3.1 is a direct and faithful translation of the original Greek text preserved in the *Philocalia*. The famously controversial subjects, the Trinity, the Resurrection of the Body and the pre-existence of souls, are notably absent from the collection. The *Philocalia* is of only limited use therefore in the detection of Rufinus' emendations.

By contrast, the excerpts preserved by Justinian deal almost exclusively with these controversial subjects. It might be expected therefore that these quotations would be of the utmost value in the reconstruction of the original Greek text of the *de Principiis*. Indeed, Koetschau's 1923 edition of the *de Principiis* incorporates almost all Justinian's quotations into the main body of the text.<sup>35</sup> There is not however unanimous scholarly agreement concerning the status of these fragments.<sup>36</sup> Bardy is the leading light of those scholars who question the value of Justinian's quotations in the reconstruction of the text of the *de Principiis*. Bardy points out that the Emperor was not at all concerned with a long-dead Alexandrian, but with the contemporary problem of the Origenist monks of Palestine. It is they who are anathematized. Bardy concludes that the quotations preserved in the *Epistle to Mennas* and the two lists of anathemas may well be described as 'Origenist', but they are certainly not quotations from the *de Principiis*.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Bardy (1923), p.206. See Russell (1988), p.54 for a criticism of Jerome's interpretation of *de Principiis* 4.4.9: he 'has not understood.'

<sup>33</sup> Rist (1975). The conclusion of such investigations is that, although Rufinus has abridged the arguments and at times added explanatory parentheses for the benefit of a rather less educated Roman readership (Bardy (1923), p.112), the original argument remains intact.

<sup>34</sup> Bardy (1923), p.112.

<sup>35</sup> Scott (1991), p.170 discusses the reaction, both positive and negative, to Koetschau's landmark edition.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the *Sources Chrétiennes* editors of the *de Principiis* call Koetschau's use of Justinian's fragments 'aberrant' and admit none of them into the text.

<sup>37</sup> Bardy (1923), pp.50-86. Although I accept Bardy's basic contention that the Emperor was not interested in theology *per se*, but rather with the conflicts and controversies of the Holy Land, I do not feel that there can be a blanket rejection of Justinian's quotations. It seems to me that Bardy has some rather odd things to say on the subject. For example, he rejects the authenticity of Anathema 9, which deals with the doctrine of spherical resurrected bodies, on the grounds that there is no hint of such a theory in Rufinus' Latin version of the *de Principiis*. But surely this is just the kind of heretical theory that Rufinus *would* excise from his translation? Even stranger is Bardy's rejection of Anathema 13,

The safest way to detect Rufinus' emendations is to compare his Latin translations with the works of Origen that survive intact in the original Greek. That is to say, we should be wary of claims made in Rufinus' Latin versions that are contradicted by claims made in works which survive in Greek. Conversely, we should be inclined to accept the authenticity of a Rufinian translation if it is corroborated by a passage that survives in Greek. I believe that this comparative method is the safest, most certain way of detecting Rufinus' emendations. In the following discussion of the authenticity of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment, we shall make detailed comparisons of the claims made in this fragment with claims made in the *Commentary on St John* and the *Contra Celsum*.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ὁμοούσιος CLAIM IN LATE FOURTH CENTURY TRINITARIAN CONTROVERSIES

### (2.1)

None of the above need concern us if we accept the solution of Mark Edwards that there was no need for Rufinus to alter the text of the *Commentary on Hebrews*, specifically that there was no need for Rufinus to pretend that Origen had used the term ὁμοούσιος.<sup>38</sup> Edwards argues that by the time Rufinus began to translate the *Apology* (c.397), the question of ὁμοούσιος had left the centre stage. The controversy had died down and the term was by and large ignored.<sup>39</sup> As evidence for this claim, Edwards points out that Rufinus, writing *propria persona*, does not use the word. He concludes that if the term ὁμοούσιος no longer had a major theological significance, it would be unnecessary and therefore unlikely for Rufinus to insert it into the text. It is on these grounds that Edwards accepts the authenticity of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment. I am not persuaded by this. My response to Edwards will take the form of a brief overview of the historical circumstances surrounding and prompting Rufinus' translation of Pamphilus' *Apology*.<sup>40</sup>

### (2.2)

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dealing with the soul of Christ and placed by Koetschau at *de Principiis* 4.4.4. Bardy comments that it is 'douteux' whether Origen would have taught that the soul of Christ pre-existed. We might ask how Bardy deals with *de Principiis* 2.9, in which Origen discusses at great length the doctrine of the Saviour's human soul. But despite these quibbles, I believe that Bardy is correct to cast at least some doubt on the quotations preserved by Justinian. In this, he is followed (to a lesser degree) by Chadwick (1948), pp.95-6, Guillaumont (1961), Refoulé (1961), pp.229, 233 and 256-7 and Grillmeier (1965), p.292.

<sup>38</sup> Edwards (1998), p.661.

<sup>39</sup> Clark (1992), p.162 seems to share this view: she argues that by the late fourth century other subjects, notably the Resurrection of the Body, had become much more important.

<sup>40</sup> For this, we rely heavily on Bardy (1923), pp.90-93, Murphy (1945), pp.66-81, Kelly (1975), pp.195-209, Hammond-Bammel (1977) and Amacker and Junod (2002), pp.4-40.



Rufinus tells us that he began to translate the *Apology* in response to the request of a certain Macarius, to whom the work is dedicated.<sup>41</sup> But although this was the immediate spur, I feel that recent events in Palestine had provided Rufinus with a far more urgent motive. Rufinus' translation of the *Apology* must be understood as a response to Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, and as a refutation of his recent attacks on Origen. In the year 393, Epiphanius sailed from Cyprus to Palestine to deliver a searing attack against what he saw as the pestilent, prevalent and persistent heresy of Origenism. Having already attacked Origen in print,<sup>42</sup> Epiphanius felt the need for a more personal and more direct approach. John, the Bishop of Jerusalem, was singled out for particular rebuke. In his own church, the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, the Bishop was openly accused of being an Origenist; envoys were dispatched throughout the Holy Land, urging the clergy to reject the authority of their heretical Bishop. The campaign concluded with the circulation of a lengthy letter detailing the various heresies of Bishop John.<sup>43</sup> The majority of the clergy and the monks - (including St Jerome, then living in a monastery near Bethlehem) - fell into line and agreed that both Origen and Bishop John were heretics. Rufinus was the notable exception. He became the champion of his beleaguered Bishop and accepted the challenge of defending Origen - thereby also defending John, whose passion for Origen could not be denied - as an orthodox son of the Church.<sup>44</sup> Rufinus' translation of Pamphilus' *Apology for Origen* must be seen as the crucial first stage in this lengthy, but ultimately futile project. It seems obvious to me that Rufinus would have had the criticisms of Epiphanius firmly in mind when he translated the *Apology*. It was the perfect opportunity to prove to the hostile world that Origen was an orthodox catholic.<sup>45</sup>

(2.3)

The crucial point for us is that Epiphanius was, in the words of Hanson, 'almost fanatically pro-Nicene'.<sup>46</sup> In both the *Pinarion* and the *Ancoratus* he repeatedly insists that the Father and the Son are

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<sup>41</sup> Bardy (1923), pp.90-92, Amacker and Junod (2002), pp.9-14 and Murphy (1945), pp.83 and 92.

<sup>42</sup> In the *Ancoratus* (AD 374) and *Panarion* (AD 376).

<sup>43</sup> The letter, *Against John of Jerusalem*, survives only in Latin translation (Jerome, *Epistola* 51).

<sup>44</sup> I do not of course intend to present Rufinus as a selfless defender of Episcopal authority. He had his own very good reasons for establishing Origen's orthodoxy.

<sup>45</sup> Bardy (1923), pp.95-6 recognizes that Epiphanius' recent visit to Palestine and his condemnation of Origenism were very fresh in Rufinus' mind when he returned to Rome in 397 and responded to Macarius' request to translate the works of Origen. Bardy does not however deal with the specific ways in which the attacks of Epiphanius might have encouraged Rufinus to alter the text of the *Apology*. In fact, he accepts that the translation was 'généralement exact.'

<sup>46</sup> Hanson (1988), pp.661-2.

ὁμοούσιος and condemns those who think otherwise.<sup>47</sup> In chapter 64 of the *Pinarion*, Epiphanius explicitly accuses Origen of denying the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son: ἐν πολλοῖς τόποις εὔραμεν αὐτὸν κακῶς τὸν μονογενῆ θεὸν ἀπαλλοτριοῦντα τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς θεότητός τε καὶ οὐσίας, ὁμοῦ δὲ καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα. He is shocked that Origen did not believe that the Son was of the Father's substance, but taught that the two were entirely different from one another: ἐκ γὰρ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς οὐ θέλει εἶναι τὸν υἱόν, ἀλλὰ παντάπασιν ἀλλότριον πατρὸς τοῦτον εἰσηγεῖται. Epiphanius concludes that Origen was the heretical precursor of the Arians and the Anomoeans, who 'rejected the doctrine of ὁμοούσιος' (*ibid.* 76.12.4).<sup>48</sup>

(2.4)

We can further gauge the importance of ὁμοούσιος at this date by examining the correspondence of John, Jerome and Rufinus. In the spring of 397, John attempted to clear his name by setting out in an open letter to Theophilus of Alexandria a list of orthodox doctrines to which he wholeheartedly subscribed.<sup>49</sup> The list includes the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Trinity: *sanctam et adorandam Trinitatem unius substantiae et coaeternam, et eiusdem gloriae et divinitatis credimus* (*contra Iohannem*. 8.16-18). Jerome, in his reply to the letter, argues that this doctrine was one of the *sine qua non* of the Christian faith, but one which John has only very recently espoused.<sup>50</sup> The accusation of hypocrisy is obvious. In chapter 3, Jerome had already argued that the Arians, with whom John was well acquainted, denied the consubstantiality of the Trinity: *et Ariani, quos optime nosti, multo tempore propter scandalum nominis, ὁμοούσιον se damnare simulabant*.

<sup>47</sup> υἱὸς ὁμοούσιος τῷ πατρί. οὐ συνούσιος, ἀλλ' ὁμοούσιος (*Ancoratus* 6; in fact the whole of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son); ἵνα μὴ ἀλλότριον νομισθεῖν πατρός μηδὲ υἱοῦ, ἀλλὰ τῆς αὐτῆς οὐσίας (*ibid.* chapter 8 – *à propos* the Holy Ghost); μία συμφωνία, μία θεότης τῆς αὐτῆς οὐσίας (*Pinarion* chapter 67). In chapter 76 of the *Pinarion* Epiphanius refutes the Anomoeans by repeating the Nicene slogan: υἱὸς ἐκ πατρὸς ἀληθινῶς καὶ ὁμοουσίως γεγεννημένος; ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ ἴσον γεννῶν ἀχράντῳ καὶ ἀκαταλήπτῳ οὐσίᾳ, ὁμοουσίως τὸ οὐσιῶδες καὶ ἐνυπόστατον θεῖον γέννημα. In chapter 81, we are again reminded of the crucial doctrine of consubstantiality: μία οὐσία. In chapter 116, the bishop attacks those who distinguish the οὐσία of the Son from the οὐσία of the Father; these heretics must understand that the Trinity is μία οὐσία (118) and that the Father and Son are ὁμοούσιος (119).

<sup>48</sup> cf. *Against John of Jerusalem* 3, in which Epiphanius again accuses Origen of inspiring the Arians: *Arii parentem et aliarum hereseon radicem et parentem*. It is very likely that Epiphanius would have addressed the question of consubstantiality in his sermons in Jerusalem, but the text of these sermons is no longer extant.

<sup>49</sup> The letter survives only as quotations in Jerome's reply, *Against John of Jerusalem*. For a discussion of the circumstances and contents of this letter, see Kelly (1975), pp.204-208.

<sup>50</sup> *nisi haec diceret, ecclesiam non teneret. et tamen non quaero si ante non dixeris . . . statim sera conversione fidelem volo* (*ibid.* 8.23).

The question of Origen's use of ὁμοούσιος figures prominently in the Jerome-Rufinus debate. In the *de adulteratione* Rufinus specifically claims that Origen believed the Father and the Son to be *unius substantiae*.<sup>51</sup> Would Rufinus take the trouble to point this out if the subject were not a pressing issue in the contemporary theological debate? In his response to Rufinus, Jerome berates his opponent for being vague and unscholarly: where *exactly* does Origen use the term ὁμοούσιος? Jerome boasts that he possesses Origen's complete oeuvre and has read almost all of it. The implication is that Jerome has not come across the ὁμοούσιος quotation and that Rufinus has invented it for polemical, apologetic purposes (*Apologia contra Rufinum* 2.16).

The intensity of the First Origenist Controversy involved Jerome in a great deal of correspondence. He was in almost constant contact not only with Rufinus and Bishop John, but also with friends and colleagues in Rome. It was well known that as a young man Jerome had translated the *Homilies* of Origen and that he remained an ardent admirer of his exegetical method. In the current anti-Origenist climate, this put Jerome in a rather difficult position. Was he or was he not a disciple of Origen? In a series of famous letters Jerome attempts to convince his friends in Rome of his own undeniable orthodoxy by exposing and condemning Origen's various heresies. In the letter to Pammachius and Oceanus, Jerome (like Epiphanius) describes Origen as the *fontem Arii*. Specifically, Jerome accuses Origen of denying that the Son is 'from the substance of the Father': *damnantes enim eos qui Filium de Patris negant esse substantia, illum* (scil. Origen) *pariter Ariumque damnaverunt* (Jerome, *Epistola* 84.4). In Letter 94, Jerome details his allegiance to the Nicene Creed and expressly insists on the doctrine of consubstantiality: *nos enim insistentes patrum vestigiis et scripturarum vocibus eruditi, docemus in ecclesiis et confitemur Trinitatem increatum, aeternam, unius esse in tribus subsistentiis substantiae in una deitate Trinitatem adorantes*.

(2.5)

The most significant evidence in our assessment of the importance of the term ὁμοούσιος at this particular date and in this particular theological milieu is to be found in Rufinus' own works. Since Epiphanius' visit to Palestine and his own rather rash defence of Bishop John, Rufinus had come to

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<sup>51</sup> At the start of the *de adulteratione*, Rufinus attempts to prove the malicious interpolation of Origen's text by pointing out a glaring contradiction: *qui Patrem et Filium unius substantiae, quod Graece ὁμοούσιον dicitur, in consequentibus statim capitulis alterius esse substantiae et creatum poterat dicere eum, quem paulo ante de ipsa natura Dei Patris pronuntiaverat natum* (*de adulteratione* 1.33). Rufinus argues that it is impossible to believe that anyone could contradict himself on such an important matter. The text must therefore be corrupt. Rufinus naturally ascribes the first claim to

realize the precariousness of his position within the Church and had recognized the pressing need to defend himself from the slur of heresy. It was at this time that Rufinus wrote his three famous *Apologies*, detailing an unwavering allegiance to the faith of the Church, specifically to the faith of the Council of Nicaea. Throughout these works, we find countless references to consubstantiality. Rufinus clearly felt that this was the doctrine on which everything depended, the belief that would finally separate the sheep from the goats. Defending himself against the accusations of Epiphanius and Jerome, Rufinus constantly re-iterates his acceptance of ὁμοούσιος.

In the first of the three *Apologies*, written to Pope Anastasius,<sup>52</sup> Rufinus makes the following statement to anyone who dares to cast doubt on his orthodoxy: *sciat quod de Trinitate ita credimus quod unius naturae sit, unius deitatis, unius eiusdemque virtutis atque substantiae . . . Trinitatis in subsistentibus personis, unitas in natura atque substantia (Apologia ad Anastasium 2)*. In the *Apology against Jerome*, Rufinus refers to a similar whispering campaign and makes a similar defence: *illi ergo sic mihi tradiderunt et sic teneo: quod Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus unius deitatis sit uniusque substantiae (Apologia contra Hier. 1.4.14)*. A little later in the same work, Rufinus re-affirms his orthodox, Nicene credentials by describing the *Trinitas in personarum distinctione, unitas in veritate substantiae (ibid. 1.4.23-4)*.

The enormous *Expositio Symboli*, an exhaustive commentary on the Apostles' Creed, is Rufinus' definitive defence of himself, a step by step description of his allegiance to the minutiae of orthodox belief. It is hardly surprising that we find in this work repeated references to the unity and consubstantiality of the Trinity.<sup>53</sup> The three persons are one in nature and substance (*unum tamen sunt substantia vel natura*).<sup>54</sup> The Father and the Son share one and the same immortal substance (*illam deitatis immortalem substantiam, quae una ei eademque cum Patre est*).<sup>55</sup> The Trinity is distinct in name and person, but inseparable in substance (*vocabulis personique discreta, inseparabilis substantia deitatis*).<sup>56</sup> There is a *consona substantiae*<sup>57</sup> so that the Holy Trinity is one according to substance

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Origen. The second claim, that the Son is different in substance from the Father, even a creature, must be the work of malicious interpolators.

<sup>52</sup> Murphy (1945), pp.134-36 discusses the circumstances surrounding the writing of this first *Apology*.

<sup>53</sup> Murphy (1945), pp.179-184 discusses Rufinus' *Expositio Symboli*, but ignores the various references to consubstantiality.

<sup>54</sup> *Expositio* 4.33; 4.49.

<sup>55</sup> *Expositio* 5.41.

<sup>56</sup> *Expositio* 8.40.

<sup>57</sup> *Expositio* 37.59.

(*sacra Trinitas unum sit per substantiam*).<sup>58</sup> Finally, in the Preface to his translation of Pamphilus' *Apology*, Rufinus presents the reader with a résumé of his own beliefs. Once again, the unity of the Trinity figures prominently: *nos autem, sicut traditum nobis est a sanctis patribus, ita tenemus, quod sancta Trinitas coaeterna sit et unius naturae uniusque virtutis atque substantiae*.

(2.6)

From this brief over-view of the Trinitarian theology of late fourth century Palestine, I find it impossible to accept Edwards' claim that the question of ὁμοούσιος was of no importance at this date. It seems rather the case that the question was of central importance and that proof of orthodoxy depended to a very large extent upon whether or not one accepted the consubstantiality of the Trinity. This was especially true in the Holy Land, which was still reeling from the attacks of that powerful arch-Nicene, Epiphanius. Before the arrival of Epiphanius, the details of Nicene theology were of little importance to the theologians of Palestine. In Jerome's early works, there is almost no reference to the intricacies of Trinitarian dogma. The young Jerome was far more interested in translating the Bible and in extolling the virtues of chastity to aristocratic young ladies.<sup>59</sup> The visit of Epiphanius changed everything. His attacks on Origen and Origenism aroused an unprecedented interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. The question of consubstantiality suddenly became the hottest theological issue. Against Edwards, I feel that there would have been very strong reasons and a very strong temptation for Rufinus to pretend that Origen had used the term in a relatively obscure work. As we have seen, Rufinus prefaces his translation of the *Apology* with a condemnation of anyone who denies ὁμοούσιος: it is surely to be expected that the 'quotations' from Origen which follow will conform to Rufinus' strictures. He is advertising to his readers the kinds of doctrines they are to expect.

Our conclusion to this first section is two-fold. (1) Rufinus would have had good apologetic and polemical reasons for pretending that Origen applied the term ὁμοούσιος to the Son. The term could no longer be ignored, but had become something of a neck-verse for anyone claiming to be orthodox. (2) Rufinus' method of translation allowed him to amend any text that did not conform to the strict standards of Nicaea. But having established both motive and opportunity, what evidence do we have that Rufinus is in fact guilty? In the remaining sections of this chapter, we shall attempt to answer this question.

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<sup>58</sup> *Expositio* 46.4.

<sup>59</sup> Kelly (1975), pp.141-178.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE ὁμοούσιος CLAIM TO THE CHARGE THAT ORIGEN BELIEVED THE SON TO BE *INNATUS*.

(3)

We begin our discussion by considering the purpose and function of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment within the context of Pamphilus' *Apology*. This passage, along with five others, is part of an unusually long *responsio* to the charge that Origen believed the Son to be *innatus*. This is the first charge to which Pamphilus responds; it was obviously very worrying to him. Moreover, as we have seen, the topic had already been aired in Pamphilus' general introduction to Origen's system (*Apologia* III, 109). It would appear that Origen was accused of believing that the Son, like the Father, was unbegotten.

But far from refuting the charge in question, the claim that the Father and the Son are ὁμοούσιος seems (at best) to be irrelevant or (at worst) actually to support and corroborate the charge.<sup>60</sup> The conclusion of the *responsio* is particularly odd: *satis manifeste, opinor, et valde ostensum est, quod Filium Dei de ipsa substantia natum dixerit, id est ὁμοούσιος quod est eiusdem cum Patre substantiae, et non esse creaturum, neque per adoptionem, sed natura Filium verum ex ipso Patre generatum* (*Apologia* 100). According to this peroration, Origen has been vindicated on three important points: (1) the Son was generated from the substance of the Father, (2) the Father and the Son are therefore of one substance and (3) the Son is not a creature. This is an irrelevant conclusion that has no significance whatsoever for the charge in question. The conclusion ought to have been simply that the Son is *ex Patre natus*.<sup>61</sup>

Surely our suspicions should be aroused by this and doubt cast on the authenticity of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment. It seems reasonable to me to conclude that the last passage of the *responsio* did not appear in Pamphilus' original *Apology*, for the simple reason that it does not provide an adequate response to the charge that Origen believed the Son to be *innatus*. I believe that it was appended by Rufinus in order to respond to, or at least to forestall, an entirely different accusation.

At this point it is important to recall that Pamphilus and Rufinus lived and worked in very different historical and theological contexts and had therefore very different apologetic agenda. Pamphilus wrote the *Apology for Origen* between 308 and 310, in response to a variety of contemporary attacks on Origen. The opening list of accusations reveals the nature and content of these attacks.<sup>62</sup> First and

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<sup>60</sup> Williams (1993), p.154 and Hanson (1985), p.66.

<sup>61</sup> Hanson (1985), p.67 and Williams (1993), p.154.

<sup>62</sup> Williams (1993), p.155.

foremost, is the accusation that Origen believed the Son to be *innatus*. As we have seen, this accusation was most likely the response to the doctrine of eternal generation.<sup>63</sup>

Williams<sup>64</sup> suggests another possible interpretation of the *innatus* charge. Comparing the first accusation with the third accusation, that Origen believed Christ to be a mere man, Williams interprets the first accusation as an accusation of Monarchianism. Williams lays great stress on the historical context in which Pamphilus wrote the *Apology*. We know that the intended recipients of the *Apology* were the Christian prisoners condemned to the mines of Palestine. Williams argues that these prisoners, mostly of Egyptian extraction, had been disturbed by various reports that their fellow countryman was in fact a Sabellian. These reports were likely to have been circulated by the Bishops of Asia Minor who had had first hand experience of the dangers of Sabellianism and who were most sensitive to any hints of the heresy. Williams concludes that Pamphilus wrote the *Apology* to re-assure the martyrs of Palestine that Origen was not a Sabellian. He feels able to quote various passages which prove that Origen distinguished the Son from the Father as one ‘born from him’.

When Rufinus decided to translate the *Apology* in AD 397, the main issues of the Origenist Controversy had changed dramatically. At the beginning of the fourth century, Origen stood accused of exalting the Son above his proper station, even to equality with the Father, as ‘unbegotten’. By the end of the fourth century, the major objection to Origen’s Trinitarian theology was almost the opposite of this: Origen was now accused of reducing the status of the Son to that of a mere creature and of denying consubstantiality. It is only within this context of changing theological milieux that we can understand Rufinus’ textual emendation. I would argue that it was in response to this new accusation that Rufinus appended the passage from the *Commentary on Hebrews*. Although it had no relevance for the *innatus* charge, Rufinus could not bear to ignore the issue of ὁμοούσιος.

#### THE RELATION OF THE ὁμοούσιος CLAIM TO ORIGEN’S OVERALL THEOLOGY.

##### (4.1)

The problem to which we must now turn is whether the appended passage is a genuine quotation from the missing *Commentary on Hebrews*. Did Rufinus manage to find a passage in which Origen had used the crucial term ὁμοούσιος which he could then quote as definitive proof of his master’s orthodoxy? I believe that this is almost impossible. The ὁμοούσιος claim contained in the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment is entirely at odds with the main thrust of Origen’s Trinitarian theology.

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<sup>63</sup> See above, Introduction.

The quotations and arguments of chapter 1 have shown how Origen's skirmish with the Monarchians led him to insist upon the eternal existence of Father, Son and Holy Ghost as three separate and individual οὐσίαι, different and distinct from one another. Surely this alone is sufficient reason for rejecting the authenticity of the ὁμοούσιος fragment? It would be impossible for the οὐσία of the Son to be simultaneously different from and the same as that of the Father.

Our discussion of Book 20 of the *Commentary on St John* showed that Origen was certainly aware of the term ὁμοούσιος.<sup>65</sup> It was part of his technical philosophical vocabulary and it could have been easily applied to the Father and the Son *had it been applicable*. In Book 20 of the *Commentary on St John*, Origen defines consubstantiality as the sharing of a certain set of common attributes, which he calls ιδιότης. The rational souls are ὁμοούσιος because they all share the same attributes, i.e. the ability to remember, to think and to make moral choices. Conversely, wax, lead and gold are different οὐσίαι because each exhibits a different set of attributes. If Origen believed that the Father and the Son were ὁμοούσιος, this would necessarily mean that they shared the same ιδιότης. But this is expressly denied in the *Commentary on St John*. To deny the Son his own ιδιότης is the heresy of Monarchianism: ἀρνούμενους ιδιότητα υἱοῦ ἑτέραν παρά τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ὁμολογούντας θεὸν εἶναι τὸν μέχρι ὀνόματος παρ' αὐτοῖς "υἱὸν" προσαγορευόμενον (*Commentary on St John* 2.2).<sup>66</sup> Similarly, in fragment 37 of the *Commentary on St John* Origen vehemently objects to the Monarchian claim that the Holy Ghost does not have its own ιδιότης: οὐκ ἔχον κατ' αὐτοῦς ὑπάρξεως ιδιότητα.<sup>67</sup>

We must always bear in mind that Origen uses the term ιδιότης to describe generic characteristics, properties common to a particular group or species, not the unique qualities of an individual within that group.<sup>68</sup> For example, everything golden shares the same ιδιότης: gold cup "A" has the same ιδιότης as gold cup "B". Similarly, Socrates has the same ιδιότης as Simias.<sup>69</sup> To use a helpful Aristotelian distinction, Origen applies the term ιδιότης to 'secondary οὐσία', not to 'primary οὐσία'. This point has very important ramifications for our understanding of Origen's Trinitarian doctrine. When Origen argues that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost have their own unique ιδιότης, this does not mean that they

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<sup>64</sup> Williams (1993), pp.158-163

<sup>65</sup> See chapter 1, section 6.2.

<sup>66</sup> See chapter 1, sections 5.4 and 10.2, for our discussion of this important passage.

<sup>67</sup> See chapter 1, section 5.4, for our discussion of this important passage.

<sup>68</sup> Hence, for Origen the term ὁμοούσιος means that two substances are *generically* and not *numerically* identical. On this distinction, see Kelly (1977), pp.130 and 234 and Hanson (1985), p.62.

<sup>69</sup> See *Commentary on St John* 20.23 (20) and our discussion in chapter 1, sections 5.4 and 6.2.



are three distinct ‘persons’, three individual examples of the same generic οὐσία, namely the οὐσία of divinity.<sup>70</sup> It means that each is a separate and individual οὐσία.

We can only conclude that Origen would not, could not, have applied the term ὁμοούσιος to the Son, for fear of falling into the very heresy he most despised. It is the Monarchians who believe that the Father and the Son are one οὐσία and who deny the Son his own ιδιότης.

We might also note that Origen’s extreme subordinationism makes the ὁμοούσιος claim even more unlikely. We have seen in some detail how Origen thoroughly subordinates the Son to the Father.<sup>71</sup> He is an eternally contingent and dependent being, the Father’s tool and intermediary in creation, revelation and redemption, the means through which and by which God might deal with fallen man, but who will eventually prove redundant and *de trop*. Surely the notion of consubstantiality incorporates, by very definition, the notion of equality? The adoption of the term at Nicaea was primarily intended as a technical expression of the Son’s perfect equality with the Father. So, too, when Origen calls the rational souls ὁμοούσιος he means to emphasize their equality, thereby refuting the Gnostic doctrine of ranks or classes of soul.

#### (4.2)

We must also be wary of the explanation given in the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment of exactly how and why the Father and the Son are said to be *unius substantiae*. Before reaching this dramatic conclusion, Origen/Rufinus argues that the Son is born ‘from the very substance’ of God (*ex ipsa Dei substantia generatur*). Indeed, this claim is taken as the premiss for the conclusion: it is precisely because the Son is born from the substance of the Father that he is consubstantial with him. Solomon’s claim that Wisdom is the *effluence of the glory of the Almighty* suggests a useful, if imperfect, analogy. As *vapor* proceeds from the substance of a body and is therefore consubstantial with it (*aporrhoea enim ὁμοούσιος videtur, id est unius substantiae cum illo corpore ex quo est aporrhoea vel vapor*), so the Son proceeds from the substance of the Father and is therefore consubstantial with him.

Although Origen certainly believed that the Son was born ‘from the Father’ rather than created *ex nihilo*,<sup>72</sup> it is extremely doubtful that he would have expanded this to mean ‘from *the substance of the*

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<sup>70</sup> Of course, this is precisely what the term would come to mean in the aftermath of the Arian Controversy. On this point, see section 9.

<sup>71</sup> Chapter 1, sections 10.1-14.

<sup>72</sup> See *de Principiis* 1.2.2, 1.2.4, 1.2.9, 1.2.11, 1.2.13, 1.5.5, 1.7.2, 2.9.2 and 4.4.8. Of course, this belief is an important corollary to the doctrine of eternal generation.

Father'. Indeed, at *Commentary on St John* 20.18 (157), this is expressly denied.<sup>73</sup> In this passage, Origen rejects the notion of ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς as implying the Gnostic doctrine of divine fission.<sup>74</sup> Commenting on Christ's claim, *I came from God* (John 8.42), Origen insists that the verse must be understood as a reference to the Incarnation and kenosis, and not as a description of the 'birth' of the Son from the substance of the Father: ἄλλοι δὲ τὸ ἕξῃ λθον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ διηγῆσαντο ἀντὶ τοῦ "γεγεννημαὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ", οἷς ἀκολουθεῖ ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας φάσκειν τοῦ πατρὸς γεγεννηθῆαι τὸν υἱόν, οἶονεὶ μειομένην καὶ λείποντος τῇ οὐσίᾳ ἢ πρότερον εἶχεν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐπὶ γέννησιν τὸν υἱόν, ὥσει νοῆσαι τις τοῦτο καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐγκυμόνων. ἀκολουθεῖ δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ σῶμα λέγειν τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν καὶ διηρηθῆαι τὸν πατέρα, ἅπερ ἐστὶν δόγματα ἀνθρώπων μὴδ' ὄναρ φύσιν ἀόρατον καὶ ἀσώματον πεφαντασμένων, οὐσαν κυρίως οὐσίαν. οὗτοι δὲ δῆλον ὅτι ἐν σωματικῷ τόπῳ δώσουσιν τὸν πατέρα, καὶ τὸν υἱόν τόπον ἐκ τόπου ἀμείψαντα σωματικῶς ἐπιδεδημηκέναι τῷ βίῳ, καὶ οὐχὶ κατὰ στασιν ἐκ καταστάσεως, ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς ἐξειλήφαμεν.

It is clear from this passage that Origen utterly rejected the idea that the Son was ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς. The doctrine necessarily implies corporeal division, that the Father was diminished by the procession of the Son.<sup>75</sup> According to such an account, God would become like a pregnant woman, severing part of her own body (the foetus) from herself. Origen rejects this doctrine because it contradicts his fundamental theological credo: it makes sense only if the Father and the Son are bodies. An incorporeal being cannot divide itself.

Jerome also reports that Origen rejected the notion of ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς. In the *Apologia contra Rufinum*, Jerome describes a debate that took place between Origen and the Gnostic champion, Candidus. In the course of the discussion, Origen explicitly denied that the Son was *ex substantia Dei*, as implying that the Son was a *προβολή* of the Father and that both Father and Son were therefore bodies (*Apologia* 2.9).<sup>76</sup> In Letter 84.4, Jerome makes the same complaint: like the Arians, Origen refuses to accept that the Son is *de Patris substantia*. We have already seen how Epiphanius places Origen in the Arian ranks, precisely for his rejection of this fundamental orthodox belief: he denies that the Son is ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς (*Panarion* 64.4.3). We might also add that Eusebius, a

<sup>73</sup> I was alerted to this important, but strangely neglected passage by Hanson (1985), pp.201 and 412.

See also Stead (1977), p.230.

<sup>74</sup> See *de Principiis* 1.2.6 and 4.4.1 for an express rejection of the Gnostic theory.

<sup>75</sup> Hanson (1985), p.412.

<sup>76</sup> Passage quoted by Butterworth (1966), p.313. Also discussed by Bardy (1923), pp.17-19.

particularly close follower of Origen, repeatedly denied the doctrine (*Demonstratio Evangelica* 4.3.13, 5.1.9, 5.1.20).<sup>77</sup>

It is clear therefore that Origen rejected the doctrine of ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς as implying the heretical notion of corporeal division. There is however another important reason for Origen's rejection of the doctrine. Origen seems to suggest that the transcendence of God is such that even the procession of the Son must take place via an intermediary. According to this argument, the Son processes from the 'power' of God and not from his substance. The clearest discussion of this doctrine is *Commentary on St John* 13.25 (153).<sup>78</sup> This passage is part of a detailed exegesis of *Wisdom* 7.25-6; it is therefore of great importance to the present study.<sup>79</sup> In this passage, Origen insists that the Son proceeded from the 'glory', 'light' or 'power' of God and not from God himself: ἀπαύγασμα οὐ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἰδίου φωτὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀτμὶς οὐ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλὰ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ. As Stead puts it, "it seems that God's glory, light and power are conceived as attributes which in some way mediate between the Father and the Son."<sup>80</sup> This passage is surely another clear rejection of ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς.

There seems to be a trace of this important argument in Rufinus' translation of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment, where we read that the Son emanates *de virtute ipsius Dei*. Rufinus wrongly glosses this as meaning that the Son emanates *de ipsa substantia Dei*; the two are entirely different. Taking his cue from Philo, Origen regularly distinguishes the 'substance' of God from the 'power' of God.<sup>81</sup> At *de Principiis* 1.2.9, Origen similarly insists that the Son emanates from the *virtus* of God. This passage is also a gloss on *Wisdom* 7.26.<sup>82</sup> The argument is rather difficult to follow and has probably been ruined by Rufinus. However, it is still possible to detect Origen's original insistence that the 'power' of God is a connecting and communicating intermediary. It is from this 'power' that the Son proceeds, not from God himself, not 'from the substance of God'.

We can only conclude that Rufinus altered the original text of the *Apology* to include the claim that the Son was *ex ipsa Dei substantia generatur*. This claim, like the ὁμοούσιος claim, had become an

<sup>77</sup> Stead (1977), p. 232. We discuss the question of Origen's followers in section 6.

<sup>78</sup> I was alerted to this passage by Stead (1977), p.213. He does not however discuss the full implications of the argument.

<sup>79</sup> See section 5 for a full discussion of this passage.

<sup>80</sup> Stead (1977), p.213.

<sup>81</sup> On Philo, see Sandmell (1979), pp.92-3 and Witt (1933), p.330. On Origen, see our chapter 1, sections 10.2 and 12.1.

<sup>82</sup> This passage is briefly discussed by Stead (1977), p.213.

important slogan of the Nicene faithful.<sup>83</sup> There would have been very good apologetic reasons for altering the text of the *Apology* on this particular point.

(4.3)

We have seen how Origen is constantly on guard against compromising in any way the eternal distinction of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It is for this reason that he could never have accepted the doctrine of consubstantiality.<sup>84</sup> For Origen, the ‘oneness’ of the Godhead is certainly not a unity of substance, but a union of will, love and action.<sup>85</sup> Despite a shared purpose and a common mission, the three οὐσίαι remain eternally distinct. This theology is particularly clearly expressed at *Contra Celsum* 8.12, where Origen discusses the vexed question of the exact nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son. The passage is written in response to Celsus’ complaint that the Christians have abandoned monotheism.

Origen begins by stressing that the Father and the Son are indeed ‘one’ and that monotheism remains a fundamental tenet of the new religion. He quotes various Scriptural passages in which the Saviour expresses his ‘oneness’ with the Father (John 10.30, 14.10-11 and 17.21). Yet these claims are not to be read as an endorsement of Monarchianism, namely as a ‘denial of two hypostases’. Origen insists that the unity of the Father and the Son expressed in these verses must be understood only catachrestically, similar to the way in which the early Christians were said to be ‘one heart and soul’ (Acts 4.32). For Origen, the ‘oneness’ of the Trinity is not a unity, but merely a union.<sup>86</sup> To claim that the Father and the Son are ‘one’ is no more than the acknowledgement of a shared will and shared purpose: δύο τῇ ὑποστάσει πράγματα, ἐν δὲ τῇ ὁμονοίᾳ καὶ τῇ συμφωνίᾳ καὶ τῇ ταυτότητι τοῦ βουλήματος (*Contra Celsum* 8.12).<sup>87</sup> To accept a more fundamental union, a union of substance or of nature, would be to endorse the Monarchian heresy.

The arguments of this passage are very similar to those developed in the opening chapters of the *Dialogue with Heraclides* (2.28-3.16). Mercilessly cross-examined by Origen, Maximus finally exposes himself as a ditheist: he believes that the Father and the Son are δύο θεοί. In correction of this heresy, Origen details his own Trinitarian paradigm. As always, Origen is keen to distance himself

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<sup>83</sup> Against the Arian claim that the Son was created *ex nihilo* the orthodox felt obliged to argue that he was born *ex substantia Dei*.

<sup>84</sup> See section 4.1.

<sup>85</sup> Kelly (1977), p.130, Hanson (1985), p.54 and Wolfson (1956), p.327.

<sup>86</sup> See Webster’s *Dictionary* for the important distinction between ‘union’ and ‘unity’.

<sup>87</sup> As Capelle (1951), p.148 notes, the union described in this passage is merely a “unité morale.”

from any hint of Monarchianism. He begins by insisting that the Father and the Son are different (ἕτερος) from one another. Once again, the ‘oneness’ of the Trinity is described as a union, or unification: there remains the vital element of numerical distinction. The Father and the Son are ‘one’ only as much as, for example, Adam and Eve were ‘one flesh’ or as the souls of the just are ‘one spirit’ with Christ. Although marriage unites a husband and wife, they remain separate, distinct individuals. Similarly, although a shared divinity unites Father and Son, they remain distinct.<sup>88</sup> We should take particularly note of the verb that is used in this passage: ἐνουμένον means to unite what was once disparate.<sup>89</sup>

Throughout chapter 1.2 of the *de Principiis*, Origen similarly emphasizes the ‘merely moral’ union of the Father and the Son. This is certainly not the kind of union of which the pro-Nicenes would approve: it is far indeed from the notion of substantial unity. In this chapter, Origen describes what might be called a union of action. At *de Principiis* 1.2.12, Origen likens the Son to a mirror which copies exactly the movements of the one looking at the glass (the Father): *sicut ergo in speculo omnibus motibus atque omnibus actibus, quibus is qui speculum intuetur movetur vel agit, isdem ipsis etiam ea imago; quae per speculum deformatur, actibus et motibus commovetur vel agit, in nullo prorsus declinans*. This unity of action is the sole reason for the unity of the Father and the Son: they are one because – and only because – they perform the same acts.

Finally, there is a very interesting passage in the *Commentary on St John* in which Origen appears to adopt a developmental Trinitarian paradigm: the union between the Father and the Son is a union of what was once disparate. It is, in the strict sense of the word, a ‘unification’. At *Commentary on St John* 13.36 (228), Origen provides a detailed exegesis of Christ’s words to the disciples: *My food is to do the will of him who sent me* (John 4.34). He argues that there were originally two wills in the Father and the Son, but that these were gradually united. As the will of the Son conforms to the will of the Father, the two wills become one will: ὅτε ποιητῆς γίνεται τοῦ πατρικοῦ θελήματος, τοῦτο τὸ θέλειν ἐν αὐτῷ ποιῶν ὅπερ ἦν καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρί, ὥστε εἶναι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ υἱοῦ, καὶ γενέσθαι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ υἱοῦ ἀπαράλλακτον τοῦ θελήματος τοῦ πατρός, εἰς τὸ μηκέτι εἶναι δύο θελήματα ἀλλὰ ἓν θέλημα. The most important point to be noted is the way in which Origen cites this congruence of will as the sole grounds for union between the Father and the Son. The two

<sup>88</sup> See Capelle (1951), p.148 for a discussion of this point. It is a shared divinity that unites the Father and the Son.

<sup>89</sup> So, LSJ.

have *become* one. There is absolutely no suggestion here of substantial unity, or even of shared nature. The Father and the Son are 'one' simply because they have come to share the same will: ὅπερ ἐν θέλημα αἴτιον ἦν τοῦ λέγειν τὸν υἱόν· ἡγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἔσμεν" (John 10.30).

(5.1)

We conclude this section with an examination of two important passages which seem to me to provide indisputable proof of Rufinus' emendation of Origen's *Commentary on Hebrews*. We begin with *Commentary on St John* 13.25. The great importance of this passage to the present discussion is that it deals with the same subject as the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment (the relationship of the Son to the Father), supported by the same Biblical texts (*Wisdom* 7.25-26, *Ephesians* 1.21 and *Hebrews* 1.3). I believe that it is by comparison with a similar passage surviving in the original Greek that we are best able to test the authenticity of Rufinus' translation of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment. At this point, we introduce the other fragment of the *Commentary on Hebrews*, preserved by Rufinus (*Apology* 95). This quotation, a gloss on *Hebrews* 1.2, must belong to a passage immediately preceding the controversial fragment in the original *Commentary*. It is therefore a vitally important introduction, which must not be ignored. To facilitate a full and detailed comparison, we quote both passages in full:

ᾧση γὰρ δοξολογία τοῦ ὑπερέχοντος θρόνων, κυριοτήτων, ἀρχῶν, ἐξουσιῶν, καὶ παντός ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι, πρὸς τούτοις καὶ ἁγίων ἀγγέλων καὶ πνευμάτων καὶ ψυχῶν δικαίων τί δεῖ καὶ λέγειν; 'ἀλλ' ὅμως τῶν τοσούτων καὶ τηλικούτων ὑπερέχων οὐσία καὶ πρεσβεΐα καὶ δυνάμει καὶ θειότητι - ἔμψυχος γὰρ ἐστὶ λόγος - καὶ σοφία, οὐ συγκρίνεται κατ' οὐδέν τῷ πατρί. εἰκὼν γὰρ ἐστὶν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπαύγασμα οὐ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἰδίου φωτός αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀτμὶς οὐ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλὰ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀπόρροια εἰλικρινῆς τῆς παντοκρατορικῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ (*Commentary on St John* 13.25 (151-3)).

*interrogamus igitur eos quos piget confiteri Deum esse Filium Dei, quomodo poterat sola humana natura nihil in se habens eximium neque aliquid divinae substantiae, haereditatem capere omnem principatum et omnem potestatem et virtutem et his omnibus praeferri ac proponi a Patre. unde rectum videtur, quod praestantior esse debeat is qui haereditatem capit et genere utique et specie et substantia et subsistentia vel natura atque omnibus quibusque modis debet praestantior. . . cum autem discuitur hec quod dictum est de Filio Dei, quod sit splendor gloriae, necessario videtur simul disserendum et illud quod dictum est, non solum quod splendor est lucis aeternae, sed et quod huic simile in Sapientia Solomonis referetur, in qua seipsam Sapientia describit dicens: vapor enim est virtutis Dei, et*

aporrhoea gloriae Omnipotentis purissima . . . *secundum similitudinem eius vaporis qui de substantia aliqua corporea procedit, sic etiam ipse ut quidam vapor exoritur de virtute ipsius Dei: sic et sapientia ex eo procedens, ex ipsa Dei substantia generatur. sic nihilominus et secundum similitudinem corporalis aporrhææ, esse dicitur aporrhæa gloria omnipotentis pura quaedam et sincera. quae utraeque similitudines manifestissime ostendunt communionem substantiae esse Filio cum Patre. aporrhoea enim ὁμοούσιος videtur, id est unius substantiae cum illo corpore ex quo est aporrhoea vel vapor (Apologia 95-99).*

It is immediately obvious that the two passages begin in the same way. In the *Commentary on St John*, Origen quotes Ephesians 1.21 to illustrate the Son's superiority to creation: he is raised *far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come*. Origen expands this by declaring that he is superior to the holy angels, the souls of the just and all spiritual beings. This exalted status is explained in terms of the Son's 'substance', 'rank', 'power' and 'divinity'. The *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment also begins with a clear statement of the Son's superiority.<sup>90</sup> Commenting on Hebrews 1.2, Origen considers the Son's position as *heir of all things*. As in the *Commentary on St John*, Origen quotes Ephesians 1.21 as proof of the Son's exalted status: the Father has placed him *far above all principality, and power, and might*. Origen then insists that the Son is 'superior' (*praestantior*) in 'type', 'species', 'substance', 'existence', 'nature' and 'every other way'.

So far, we are on familiar territory. The ontological divide between creator and created is one of the fundamentals of Origen's theological system.<sup>91</sup> There is however a glaring disagreement in these two passages concerning the relationship of the Son to the Father. Although we find the same Scriptural verses in both passages, they are used in an entirely different way to illustrate entirely different conclusions.

The first passage is written as a response to those Christians who would promote the Son above and beyond his proper station. Origen prefaces the argument by quoting John 14.28 (*The Father who sent me is greater than I*) and Mark 10.18 (*Why do you call me good?*). These quotations are perfect Scriptural proof against those who 'over-glorify' the Son. Widdecombe argues that this passage is specifically aimed at the Gnostics, as a refutation of their belief that the Son (the God of the New

<sup>90</sup> While we must accept some tinkering by Rufinus – (the opening phrase seems particularly anachronistic) – I feel that this translation is basically correct.

Testament) is superior to the God of the Old Testament.<sup>92</sup> He makes the further claim that the subordination of the Son is integral to the anti-Gnostic polemic that characterizes the *Commentary on St John*. But it was not only the Gnostics who were accused of over-glorifying the Son. It was also a major criticism of Monarchianism. Both Hippolytus and Epiphanius accuse Noetus of ‘glorifying’ the Son (Hippolytus, *contra Noetum* 1.16-18; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 57.1.8 and 57.1.11).<sup>93</sup>

In response to this, Origen insists that, although the Son is far superior to every created being, he is not in any way comparable to the Father (οὐ συγκρίνεται κατ’ οὐδέν τῷ πατρί). Origen quotes from both the Wisdom of Solomon and the Epistle to the Hebrews to illustrate the subordination of the Son. He begins by reminding us that Wisdom is merely the *image* of God’s goodness. Within the context of Origen’s Platonic philosophy, this is sufficient proof of subordination.<sup>94</sup> With reference to the New Testament passage, Origen highlights the fact that the Son is described as the ‘brightness’ not of God himself, but merely of his *glory*. Similarly, Wisdom is called the ‘breath’ not of God, but merely of the *power* of God. It would appear that these three (‘goodness’, ‘power’ and ‘wisdom’) are intermediaries which shield the transcendent first God from contact with even his own Son.<sup>95</sup> At *Commentary on St John* 13.25, Wisdom 7.25-26 and Hebrews 1.3 are used to illustrate the distinction between the Father and the Son, specifically the subordination of the former to the latter.<sup>96</sup> The verses are employed as a Scriptural justification for the claim that the ‘Son is in no way comparable to the Father’. That they are intended as a justification or illustration of this claim is clear from the fact that Origen introduces the quotation with the explanatory conjunction ‘for’ (γάρ).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> This distinction is normally expressed as the distinction between that which exists eternally and that which is created in time, out of nothing.

<sup>92</sup> Widdecombe (1994), p.39.

<sup>93</sup> On this point, see Bethune-Baker (1933), p.104 and Le Boulluec (1985) II, pp.520-1.

<sup>94</sup> See chapter 1, section 10.2 for a discussion of this point. The reader is also referred to Jerome’s paraphrase of *de Principiis* 1.2.13, where Origen provides a very similar exegesis of Wisdom 7.26: as merely the *image of God’s goodness*, the Son is to be carefully distinguished from goodness itself.

<sup>95</sup> Stead (1977), 213. See our discussion of this in section 4.2.

<sup>96</sup> Stead (1977), p.213 and Logan (1981), p.126 both note how Origen is using Wisdom 7.25-26 in a strongly subordinate sense.

<sup>97</sup> Prestige (1952), pp.132-3 discusses the above passage in some detail and attempts to ‘explain it on orthodox lines’, by arguing that the distinction posited by Origen is merely the distinction of derivation: “that is not to say that the glory as derived is any whit less than the glory as exhibited in its source.” Two responses can be made to this. (1) This is not at all what Origen says in *Commentary on St John* 13.25. (2) According to the fundamentals of Origen’s Platonic philosophy, derivation by itself is sufficient grounds for extreme subordinationism. See chapter 1, sections 10.1-10.2, for a full discussion of this point.



In this passage, Origen develops what one might call a triple ontology. Reality comprises three distinct tiers: the Father, the Son and the created order.<sup>98</sup> His ontological system is not a simple duality between the triune God and his creation. There is a parallel, or even greater, distinction between the Father and the Son. As the Son surpasses the created souls, so he in turn is surpassed by the Father. The *locus classicus* for this theology is *Commentary on St John* 13.25:

πάντων μὲν τῶν γενητῶν ὑπερέχειν οὐ συγκρίσει ἀλλ' ὑπερβαλλούσῃ ὑπεροχῇ φαμέν τὸν σωτῆρα καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὑπερεχόμενον τοσοῦτον ἢ καὶ πλεον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς, ὅσῳ ὑπερέχει αὐτὸς καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα τῶν λοιπῶν, οὐ τῶν τυχόντων ὄντων.

This is a model re-iterated throughout Origen's oeuvre, but especially in the *Commentary on St John*. For example, in chapters 2.2-3, Origen is at great pains to distinguish the Father from the Son and the Holy Ghost: only the former is unbegotten, without needs and entirely self-sufficient.<sup>99</sup> The subordination of the Son naturally became a major issue of the First Origenist Controversy. Jerome translated Theophilus' famous Synodical Letter, in which he attacks Origen for precisely the views expressed at *Commentary on St John* 13.25: *quantum differt Paulus et Petrus Salvatore, tanto Salvator minor est Patre* (*Epistola* 92.2). In his response to the letter, Jerome focuses on this particular point as an illustration of Origen's heresy (*Epistola* 93).

The argument of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment is entirely different from that of *Commentary on St John* 13.25. This is very suspicious. It seems to me very unlikely that Origen would discuss the same issue, quote the same Biblical texts and yet reach two entirely different conclusions. In the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment, the verses are used to illustrate the identity of the Father and the Son, specifically the fact that they are ὁμοούσιος: the all-important distinction between the Father and the Son has been suppressed. Origen's triple ontology has been telescoped into a simple duality.

(5.2)

In chapter 8.14 of the *Contra Celsum*, Origen deals again with the vexed question of the relationship between the Father and the Son. The argument of this chapter is very similar to that of *Commentary on St John* 13.25. Although Origen affirms that the Son of God is himself God, he is wary of excessive worship of the Son. As in the *Commentary on St John*, the arguments of *Contra Celsum* 8.14 are aimed at those who exalt the Son above and beyond his proper station, i.e. the Gnostics. Origen was

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<sup>98</sup> The precise ontological status of the Holy Ghost is something of a moot point. At *Commentary on St John* 2.10 (6), Origen argues that the Holy Ghost is to be considered as γενητός. But much of the *de Principiis* depends upon the uncreated status of the Holy Ghost.

<sup>99</sup> See chapter 1, sections 10.1-10.2.

particularly worried about this group within the Christian community, who believed that the Saviour was the supreme God: ἔστω δέ τις ὥς ἐν πλήθει πιστευόντων καὶ δεχομένων διαφωνίαν διὰ τὴν προπέτειαν ὑποτίθεσθαι τὸν σωτῆρα εἶναι τὸν μέγιστον ἐπὶ πᾶσι θεόν (*Contra Celsum* 8.14). Origen is quick to refute this heresy and to show that the Son is significantly inferior to the Father. It is to God alone, not his Son, that we offer the 'supreme adoration'. The Son is certainly exalted, but exalted *by the Father*, who is therefore the first in rank and dignity: ἀλλ' οὐτι γέ ἡμεῖς τοιοῦτον, οἱ πειθόμενοι αὐτῷ λέγοντι· ὁ πατήρ ὁ πέμψας με μείζων μου ἐστί".

The most important and most interesting point about this chapter is the fact that Origen prefaces his remarks by quoting Hebrews 1.3 and Wisdom 7.25. As we argued above, the use of these verses in a passage that survives in Greek and is therefore undoubtedly authentic has great relevance for our assessment of the authenticity of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment. We have already seen how at *Commentary on St John* 13.25 Origen quotes these verses as Scriptural proof of the subordination of the Son to the Father. At *Contra Celsum* 8.14 Origen quotes the same verses and gives exactly the same interpretation.

Having compared in some detail the arguments of *Commentary on St John* 13.25 and *Contra Celsum* 8.14 with the arguments preserved in the controversial fragment of the *Commentary on Hebrews*, it becomes more and more likely that Rufinus altered Origen's original exegesis when he translated the fragment and added it to the *Apology*. Rufinus appears guilty of two deceptions. Not only did he append two further passages to Pamphilus' *responsio*, he radically altered the theology of the appended passages. The arguments of *Commentary on St John* 13.25 and *Contra Celsum* 8.12 allow us to reconstruct the original exegesis of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment.

THE ATTITUDE OF ORIGEN'S IMMEDIATE SUCCESSORS AND DISCIPLES TO THE TERM ὁμοούσιος.

(6.1)

The final reason for rejecting the authenticity of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment is that the term ὁμοούσιος was viewed with grave suspicion not only by Origen's immediate successors and disciples, but by the whole Greek Church until the Western delegates at the Council of Nicaea managed to force

through the controversial article. Even after 325, many of the Eastern Bishops remained opposed and, having returned to their sees, were unwilling to continue endorsing *ὁμοούσιος*.<sup>100</sup>

In the following analysis of ante-Nicene Greek Trinitarian theology, we shall see that the term *ὁμοούσιος* was forever associated with the Monarchian heresy. Its use was restricted to this particular group of Christians, specifically to the Bishops of the Pentapolis and to Paul of Samosata. By describing the Father and the Son as *ὁμοούσιος*, the Monarchians denied the Trinity in favour of a strict unitarianism. Any theologian wishing to uphold the doctrine of the Trinity was obliged to avoid the term.<sup>101</sup>

## (6.2)

Let us begin this section by recalling the events of the year 268. This was the year in which Paul of Samosata was condemned at the Council of Antioch, by a jury of Origenist Bishops, led by Malchion.<sup>102</sup> Paul is a shadowy and rather enigmatic figure, about whom little is firmly known.<sup>103</sup> We can be reasonably sure, however, that the main charge against him was Adoptionism. This is the belief that Jesus Christ was a mere man, who at his baptism was filled with the grace of God and thereby enabled to fulfil his salvific rôle. The crux of Adoptionism is the belief that Christ was the Son of God only by grace (adoption) and not by nature. As Cadiou has pointed out, Adoptionism was often the corollary or consequence of Monarchianism.<sup>104</sup> If one believes that the Godhead is an indivisible unity, it is impossible to say that the *Son* of God was incarnated. With this theological foundation, it is natural and almost inevitable to conclude that Jesus Christ was a mere man.<sup>105</sup> It was certainly true of Paul of Samosata that Adoptionism and Monarchianism were two sides of the same coin.<sup>106</sup> Later reports show that he allowed no distinction between Father, Son and Holy Ghost beyond a mere verbal convenience. Epiphanius gives the following account of the proceedings of the Council of Antioch:

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<sup>100</sup> It was for this reason that the Emperor deemed it necessary to convene a new Council at Seleucia. On this, see Cazenove (1883), pp.56-7. See also Williams (1995), pp.12-15 for an overview of the Eastern opposition to *ὁμοούσιος*; even Athanasius, the great defender of Nicene theology, uses the term relatively infrequently.

<sup>101</sup> I cannot of course claim to be an expert in Trinitarian Greek theology from the death of Origen until the Council of Nicaea. The following analyses are therefore necessarily brief and reliant upon the work of other scholars.

<sup>102</sup> For the following discussion, I am indebted to Bardy (1923), pp.252-8, de Riedmatten (1952), Kelly (1977), pp.117-18 and, Edwards (1998), p.64.

<sup>103</sup> See Stead (1993): a paper devoted to the difficulties in interpreting Paul.

<sup>104</sup> Cadiou (1935), pp.346-7. See chapter 1, section 4.1.

<sup>105</sup> The alternative was to conclude that the entire Godhead was incarnated, in which case Monarchianism becomes the corollary of Patripassianism. On this, see chapter 1, section 4.1.

<sup>106</sup> Raven (1923), p.51.

ἡναγκάσθησαν οἱ πατέρες, οἱ κρίναντες Παῦλον τὸν Σαμοσατέα ἐπὶ τῷ τοιούτῳ αἰρετισμῷ, ἵνα δείξωσιν ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς ὑπόστασιν ἔχει καὶ ὑπάρχων ἐστὶ καὶ ὧν ἐστίν, οὐχὶ δὲ ῥῆμά ἐστιν, οὐσίαν εἰπεῖν καὶ τὸν υἱόν, τὴν διαφορὰν τοῦ τε καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἀνυπάρκτου καὶ τοῦ ὑπάρ χοντος τῷ τῆς οὐσίας ὀνόματι ἐπιδεικνύοντες (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 73.12).<sup>107</sup>

It is particularly important that Paul's judges, who were all Origenists, condemned Paul's use of the term ὁμοούσιος. Although there are some contradictory reports, it seems most likely that the term was rejected as implying Monarchianism.<sup>108</sup> These academic bishops would have known the works of their master extremely well and would presumably have felt that they were acting with Origen's posthumous approval. It seems very unlikely that the Council would have condemned the term if it had been used by Origen. But this need not have been simply an argument *e silentio*. It was probably felt that Origen's belief in the eternal existence of three, separate οὐσίαι in the Trinity precluded the possibility of ὁμοούσιος.

(6.3)

The controversies surrounding Denys of Alexandria confirm the Origenist suspicion of ὁμοούσιος. Denys was almost a contemporary of Origen and was greatly influenced by his theology.<sup>109</sup> What is particularly interesting for us is that his opponents accuse Denys of ignoring the term ὁμοούσιος. *Prima facie*, this is a surprising accusation; it is generally assumed that no one was concerned with the question of consubstantiality until the Arian Controversy and the Council of Nicaea. Beatrice is correct therefore to draw particular attention to the identity of Denys' enemies.<sup>110</sup> Who is likely to have been upset by the rejection of the term ὁμοούσιος? The answer is the Sabellian Bishops of the Pentapolis, for whom the term had become the perfect expression of unitarian theology.

The Libyan Bishops appealed to the Pope, Denys of Rome, to condemn the Bishop of Alexandria for Trinitarian heresy.<sup>111</sup> Denys of Rome duly published an open letter insisting that the term ὁμοούσιος be accepted and warning against the heresy of ditheism.<sup>112</sup> Although the letter did not refer to him by name, Denys of Alexandria was obviously the main object of the Pope's wrath; he responded by

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<sup>107</sup> Note that the pronouncement of the Bishops is expressed in overtly Origenist terminology: the Son is an ὑπόστασις – not just a name – and his οὐσία is different from that of the Father.

<sup>108</sup> Hilary, *de Synodis* 81 and Eusebius, *Eccl. Theol.* 1.14 tell us that the term was rejected because of its Monarchian connotations. Basil, *Epistola* 52 and Athanasius, *de Synodis* 45 tell us that it was rejected because it implied corporeality. For a discussion of this, see Bethune-Baker (1933), pp.111-12 and Beatrice (2002), p.253.

<sup>109</sup> Bishop of Alexandria from 247-265.

<sup>110</sup> Beatrice (2002), pp.251-2.

<sup>111</sup> Feltoe (1904), pp.165-6.

<sup>112</sup> This letter is preserved in Athanasius, *de Decretis* 26 (quoted by Feltoe (1904), pp.176-182).

publishing a lengthy *Elenchos*.<sup>113</sup> Denys admits that he rejected the term ὁμοούσιος as non-Scriptural, but argues that he used various metaphors which meant the same thing: as a parent is to a child, a seed to a plant and a source to a stream, so is the Father to the Son. Yet, as Feltoe has shown, these images do not illustrate the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son: they show a certain generic ‘oneness’, but certainly not the numerical identity of substance.<sup>114</sup> In his *Elenchos*, Denys refuses to compromise the distinction of the Father and the Son: he continues to insist that they are two, distinct οὐσίαι.<sup>115</sup>

The implication is that for Denys, as for Malchion, ὁμοούσιος was a denial of the Trinity.<sup>116</sup> Basil reports that Denys rejected the term as it abolished the distinction between the divine hypostases: νῦν μὲν ἀναιρῶν τὸ ὁμοούσιον, διὰ τὸν ἐπ’ ἀθετήσει τῶν ὑποστάσεων κακῶς αὐτῷ κεκρημένον (Basil, *Epist.* 9.2).<sup>117</sup> Gustave Bardy<sup>118</sup> tells us that this was the prevalent attitude of the school of Origen at this date: “(elle) n’était pas favorable à l’emploi du mot ὁμοούσιος . . . la distinction de personnes divines . . . pouvait paraître compromise par l’introduction de ce terme.” Of course, Hanson is right to advise against identifying the school of Origen as simply the guardians and propagators of the teachings of their master: there must have been a certain amount of development and deviation over the years.<sup>119</sup> But it is surely important that those who present themselves as the followers of Origen reject the term ὁμοούσιος as implying Monarchianism.

(6.4)

It has also been pointed out that Eusebius, a particularly staunch Origenist,<sup>120</sup> was very suspicious of the term ὁμοούσιος.<sup>121</sup> Let us begin with an *argumentum e silentio*. In chapters 1.2-3 of the *Church History*, Eusebius describes in some detail the nature of the pre-existent Christ. There is no mention of the doctrine of consubstantiality. Indeed, the Trinitarian paradigm described in these chapters seems to

<sup>113</sup> The *Elenchos* is preserved in Athanasius, *de Sententia Dionysii* 18 (quoted by Feltoe (1904), pp.187-88).

<sup>114</sup> Feltoe (1904), pp.187-188.

<sup>115</sup> Bethune-Baker (1933), p.25.

<sup>116</sup> Kelly (1977), pp.133-4 and Stevenson (1927), p.86 both discuss Denys’ life-long struggle with the Monarchians in relation to his rejection of ὁμοούσιος.

<sup>117</sup> Passage quoted and discussed in Beatrice (2002), p.252.

<sup>118</sup> Bardy (192), p.258.

<sup>119</sup> Hanson (1985), pp.410-423.

<sup>120</sup> Evidence for Eusebius’ fondness for Origen can be found in Book 6 of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (a detailed panegyric of Origen) and in his collaboration with Pamphilus on the *Apology for Origen*. Eusebius’ overall theology, not only his Christology, owes a great deal to Origen.

<sup>121</sup> For a general discussion of Eusebius’ wariness of the term, see Stevenson (1927), pp.82-3, 99, 102, Luijheid (1978), pp.55-58 and Kelly (1956), p.226. On the relevance of this for the assessment of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment, see Stead (1984), p.212 Hanson (1985), pp.58-64 and Edwards (1998), p.669.

owe a very great deal to Origenist subordinationism. The Son is presented as a contingent and dependent being, who receives his divinity, power and honour from the Father. It is by participation in the unbegotten divinity of the Father that the Son is divinized: μετοχῇ τῆς ἀγεννήτου καὶ πατρικῆς θεότητος (*H.E.* 1.3). Moreover, Eusebius, like Origen, casts the Son in the guise of a Middle-Platonic intermediary: he is the Second Principle who obeys the orders of his Father and to whom are delegated the menial tasks of creation and providence.<sup>122</sup> The Son is also described as the messenger of the Father, mediating between the transcendent God and his creation.

There is no indication that Eusebius believed the Father and the Son to be ‘of one substance’ in any of his pre-Nicene works. His customary Trinitarian paradigm is the quintessentially Origenist paradigm of two divine οὐσίαι, the one subordinate to the other.<sup>123</sup> As we argued *à propos* Origen himself, this paradigm preludes consubstantiality. In chapter 7 of the *Praeparatio Evangelica*, Eusebius carefully contrasts the ‘timeless and uncreated οὐσία of the Supreme God’ with the ‘secondary οὐσία’ of the Son.<sup>124</sup> Eusebius’ Trinity is overtly hierarchical: the Father is the Supreme God, the Son is second and the Holy Ghost a very poor third.<sup>125</sup> The *Demonstratio Evangelica* contains a similar theology. Once again, the Son is presented as a dependent and contingent being, who ‘participates’ in the divinity of the ‘one true God’ and is thus divinized (*Demonstratio Evangelica* 5.4.9-14).<sup>126</sup> In chapter 5, Eusebius quotes thirty Scriptural references which prove that the Son is a ‘second God’, subordinate to the ‘Most High and Supreme God’ (*Demonstratio Evangelica* 5.30).

In the years following the Council of Nicaea, Eusebius remained extremely wary of the term ὁμοούσιος and was remarkably reluctant to use it. Although he bowed to the authority of the orthodox élite, Eusebius would never explicitly preach the doctrine of consubstantiality. In an open letter to his parishioners, Eusebius excuses his acceptance of the Nicene Creed, specifically the controversial ὁμοούσιος article, by explaining that he was cajoled and coaxed by the Emperor himself. Eusebius’ report of the proceedings of the Council of Nicaea is very illuminating. We are told that the first session of the Council concluded with the universal acceptance of the Caesarean Creed, which Eusebius quotes in full (*ad Caesarienses* 1). The Emperor expresses his approval, but suggests two

<sup>122</sup> Eusebius even describes him as ‘serving’ (ὑπηρετησαμένη) the Father.

<sup>123</sup> So Beatrice (2002), p.244.

<sup>124</sup> μετὰ τὴν ἀναρχὸν καὶ ἀγέννητον τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν ὅλων οὐσίαν, ἄμικτον οὖσαν καὶ ἐπέκεινα πάσης καταλήψεως, δευτέραν οὐσίαν . . . εἰσάγουσι (*Praeparatio Evangelica* 7.12.2). This passage and some of the others are cited by Luijckx (1978), p.40.

<sup>125</sup> See especially *Praeparatio Evangelica* 7.15.5-9.

important amendments: the inclusion of ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας and ὁμοούσιος (*ibid.* 2). Eusebius is suspicious of both terms and is unwilling to include them in the Creed (*ibid.* 3-7). Nevertheless, his loyalty to Constantine and his desire for Church unity lead him to capitulate.<sup>127</sup> In the letter *ad Caesarienses*, Eusebius explains his objection to ὁμοούσιος by arguing that it implies divine fission (*ibid.* 3).<sup>128</sup> We can reasonably suppose however that he, like Malchion and Denys, also associated the term with Monarchianism. It seems very doubtful that Eusebius would have been so wary of the term if it had been sanctioned by Origen.

It is also important to note that the famous speech, which Eusebius wrote for Constantine to deliver, contains no reference to ὁμοούσιος. Although the *Oration of Constantine* was written after the Council of Nicaea and although it purports to be a summary and explanation of orthodox doctrine, there is no discussion of the crucial doctrine of consubstantiality. When, in chapter 2, Eusebius deals with the thorny question of the procession of the Son, he begins by quoting the useful Biblical text that such matters are beyond human comprehension: *Who can declare his generation?* (Psalm 53.8). In what follows, Eusebius concentrates upon the fact that the Father is in no way diminished by the generation of the Son. Although this was undoubtedly an important and controversial theological point in the years following the Council of Nicaea, it begs the important question of the exact relationship of the Son to the Father, in particular the vexed question of ὁμοούσιος. It is surely very important to the present study that Eusebius chooses to omit the term.

There is a similar silence in the *Life of Constantine*. Eusebius' report of the Council of Nicaea (*Life of Constantine* 3.13) is almost entirely devoted to descriptions of the Emperor's sumptuous appearance and his mastery of oratory; there is no reference to the crucial debates on ὁμοούσιος.<sup>129</sup> An historian well-disposed to the term would surely have recorded this crucially important episode. We might say that the term is conspicuous by its absence. Finally, Hanson has drawn attention to a very important passage in the *Ecclesiastical Theology*.<sup>130</sup> This work, written at the very end of Eusebius' life, includes a detailed exposition of the author's religious beliefs (*Eccl. Theo* 1.8.66). There is no mention of ὁμοούσιος.

## CONSUBSTANTIALITY IN EASTERN AND WESTERN TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

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<sup>126</sup> Passage discussed by Prestige (1969), p.142.

<sup>127</sup> I am not persuaded by Beatrice's revisionist argument that Eusebius in fact welcomed the term (Beatrice (2002), pp.243, 244 and 247).

<sup>128</sup> Luibheid (1978), p.56.

<sup>129</sup> Cameron and Hall (1999) *ad loc.*

(7.1)

The suspicion of ὁμοούσιος was not restricted to this relatively small group of Origen and his disciples. It is characteristic of the whole Eastern Church. The Western Church of course had long been used to describing the Trinity as three persons and one substance. It was Tertullian who first suggested this influential paradigm, which was subsequently adopted by almost all his compatriots.<sup>131</sup> The differing attitudes of the East and the West concerning the consubstantiality of the Trinity is neatly epitomized by the story of the two Denys-s, discussed above.<sup>132</sup> While Denys of Alexandria was vehemently opposed to the term, Denys of Rome welcomed it.<sup>133</sup>

The Greek suspicion of the term was very evident at the Council of Nicaea. It is important to remember that it was the Roman bishops, led by Ossius, who developed and championed the doctrine of consubstantiality.<sup>134</sup> The Greek Bishops were at first vehemently opposed to the innovation, and many remained wary. They objected to such prominent use of a term that did not appear in the New Testament. More importantly, however, they were wary of the Monarchian implications of consubstantiality.

(7.2)

Let it be carefully noted however that the differing attitudes of the Eastern and Western Church on the question of the consubstantiality of the Trinity cannot simply be reduced to a difference of technical terminology.<sup>135</sup> It has often been argued that the precocious development of Latin Trinitarian theology is to be explained solely by the semantic precision of the Latin language. Had the Greek language

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<sup>130</sup> Hanson (1988), p.56.

<sup>131</sup> See Tertullian, *Apologeticum* and *Adversus Praxean*. For a discussion of Tertullian's Trinitarian theology, see Osborn (1981), pp.116-39, Stead (1977), pp.202-3 and Bethune-Baker (1901), pp.15-23. On the immediate popularity of Tertullian's formula, see Kelly (1956), p.155 and Bethune-Baker (1933), p.107.

<sup>132</sup> See section 6.3. Bethune-Baker (1901), pp.24-5 and (1933), p.106 makes the point explicit: it was Rome that was invoked against Denys of Alexandria.

<sup>133</sup> As part of his argument in favour of the authenticity of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment, Bardy claims that the term ὁμοούσιος was quickly adopted as the touch-stone of orthodox belief. He refers specifically to the debate between 'les deux Denys' as evidence for this claim: "le terme ὁμοούσιος allait bientôt après Origène être adopté à Rome comme la formule même d'orthodoxie" (Bardy (1923), p.94). But in this argument, Bardy has ignored the crucial difference between the theologies of the Eastern and Western Churches at this date. The fact that Denys of Rome was in favour of ὁμοούσιος has no bearing whatsoever on whether Origen would have used it. I agree that the debate between 'les deux Denys' is very important for assessing the authenticity of the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment, but I draw from it an entirely different conclusion. The fact that Denys of Alexandria rejected the term, and his reasons for so doing, make it very likely that Origen would also have rejected the term, for the same reasons.

<sup>134</sup> So Bethune-Baker (1901), p.11 and (1933), pp.106-7, Stevenson (1927), p.99 and Kelly (1956), pp.236-7. Beatrice (2002), pp.246-7 and 270 rejects this view, but his arguments are not convincing.



included the precise equivalents of *substantia* and *persona*, the Eastern Church would not have lagged so far behind its Western counterpart. Of course this argument is in part an apology for the theologians of the East, an attempt to vindicate their doctrinal orthodoxy and to present them as unwilling and unwitting prisoners of an underdeveloped theological vocabulary. This is particularly true of the apologists for Origen. As we have seen, Hanson, Jay, Wolfson and Bethune-Baker are all keen to defend Origen by pointing out the poverty of the Greek language at this date.<sup>136</sup> Had he had the necessary words at his disposal, Origen would have readily accepted the ‘three-persons and one substance’ formula. He simply lacks the correct terminology to express himself. That is to say, it is the vagueness of Origen’s theological vocabulary, *and that alone*, which keeps him from pre-empting the Nicene formula. The fundamental problem highlighted by Origen’s apologists is the (mis)use of the crucial term οὐσία to mean a ‘person’. Had he understood οὐσία to mean ‘substance’, Origen would readily have conceded that the three persons of the Trinity were ὁμοούσιος.<sup>137</sup>

I cannot accept this argument. We have seen in some detail how Origen always interprets οὐσία as ‘substance’ or ‘nature’: he has no use for Aristotle’s ‘primary οὐσία’.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, it is axiomatic that the ante-Nicene Greek Fathers had no need and no desire to preach the substantial unity of the Father and the Son. Their Trinitarian theology cannot be explained and excused by simple reference to the constraints of the language in which they wrote. The rejection of ὁμοούσιος is rather the expression of a deep-seated belief in the fundamental difference between the Father and the Son, specifically of the subordination of the latter. It was only in the aftermath of the Arian controversy that the equality, even the identity, of the Father and the Son came to the forefront of the theological debate.<sup>139</sup> For the preceding centuries, the theologians of the Eastern Church had sought rather to distinguish and to differentiate the two, distancing themselves as far as possible from the pestilent and prevalent heresy of Monarchianism.

Patristic scholarship must always avoid the dangers of anachronism and must always resist the temptation to project the concerns of a later age. The developing theology of the Early Church makes

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<sup>135</sup> Kelly (1956), p.136 appears to share this view, when he writes that “the matter went deeper than words.”

<sup>136</sup> Chapter 1, section 6.1.

<sup>137</sup> This position is championed by Hanson (1985).

<sup>138</sup> Chapter 1, sections 6.2-6.3.

<sup>139</sup> This did not happen immediately. As we have already argued, the Eastern Bishops continued to be wary of the doctrine of consubstantiality. Williams (1995), p.15 points out that it was not until the publication of Athanasius’ *de Decretis* (352/3) that a Greek theologian began explicitly to defend the Trinitarian doctrine of the Council of Nicaea.

sense only within the correct historical and theological milieu. It is only within the specific polemical context of the Monarchian controversy that we can understand the antipathy to the term ὁμοούσιος in ante-Nicene Greek theology. Scholars must always appreciate the constantly shifting scene of the great theological debates and the constant need to revise existing paradigms.<sup>140</sup>

The Greek suspicion of ὁμοούσιος is not simply a semantic accident. It is not, as so many scholars have argued, a temporary theological hiccup arising from the improper use of οὐσία to mean ‘person’. It is rather the reflection and expression of crucially important theological convictions. While the Western Church was happy to proclaim the substantial unity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the Greeks were extremely wary of compromising in any way the eternal distinction of the three persons of the Trinity. The Monarchian threat had left an indelible mark on Greek Trinitarian theology: its enduring legacy was subordinationism, the distinguishing feature of all ante-Nicene Greek theology.

## CONCLUSION

(8)

We can conclude sections (5), (6) and (7) with the firm assurance that the whole Eastern theological tradition was wary and suspicious of the term ὁμοούσιος. For the Greeks, the term was forever tainted with the slur of heresy, forever associated with Monarchianism. Faced with such evidence, it is very hard to believe that Origen would have used the term. The Monarchians were Origen’s main doctrinal enemies: it is inconceivable that he would have adopted their most distinctive rallying cry.

In sections (1) and (2), we saw that Rufinus had both the opportunity and the motive for altering the original text of the *Commentary on Hebrews*. It would certainly have been to Rufinus’ apologetic advantage to present Origen as anticipating the most famous slogan of Nicaea and Rufinus’ method of translation allowed him ample opportunity for this kind of ‘textual emendation’. In section (3), we saw that the claim that the Father and Son are ὁμοούσιος does not help to refute the charge that Origen believed the Son to be *innatus*. It is extremely unlikely therefore that it was part of Pamphilus’ original *responsio*. A more likely scenario is that the ὁμοούσιος passage was appended by Rufinus in order to refute an entirely different charge, namely the charge that Origen believed the Son to be a creature. By the time that Rufinus came to translate the *Apology*, it was this new charge that was most prevalent and most in need of refutation. In section (4), we saw that the claim that the Father and the Son are ὁμοούσιος contradicts the fundamental tenets of Origen’s Trinitarian theology. Throughout his works,

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<sup>140</sup> This is the main argument of chapter 1, most fully discussed in the introduction and conclusion.

Origen responds to Monarchian modalism by arguing that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three separate and individual οὐσίαι, eternally different and distinct from one another. It is inconceivable that he would ever reject this and come to believe that there was in fact only one divine οὐσία. We briefly recalled how Origen's Trinitarian theology is characterized by a thorough and obvious subordinationism, and argued that this alone precludes consubstantiality. We also saw how the basis or justification for the ὁμοούσιος claim, that the Son was *ex ipsa Dei substantia generatur*, is elsewhere vehemently rejected by Origen. We further argued that Origen did not describe the 'oneness' of the Father and the Son in terms of substantial unity, but in terms of shared will and common purpose. Finally, by analysing the arguments of *Commentary on St John* 13.25 and *Contra Celsum* 8.14 we saw how Origen elsewhere interprets Wisdom 7.25-26 and Hebrews 1.3 in a strongly subordinationist sense. This cast further doubt on the controversial fragment and allowed us to reconstruct the original exegesis.

In the theological ferment of the late fourth century, Rufinus could not allow himself a faithful translation of Origen's *Commentary on Hebrews*. It would have been madness to proclaim to the Latin-speaking world that Origen was a subordinationist, particularly for a translator whose main aim was the defence of Origen and the establishment of his orthodox credentials. Acutely aware of the negative implications of Origen's original exegesis of Hebrews 1.3 and Wisdom 7.25, Rufinus added a gloss that in effect reversed the original meaning of the fragment. In the hands of such a skilful apologist, Origen is permitted to say only what his posthumous audience is willing to hear.

#### RUFINUS' OTHER EMENDATIONS

(9)

In the final section of this chapter, we discuss various other passages in which Rufinus foists upon Origen the same spurious and anachronistic orthodoxy. It will be immediately apparent that the emendation detected in the *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment is far from unusual. Rufinus' Latin versions of the works of Origen frequently include the assertion of consubstantiality.

At *Commentary on Romans* 7.5 (P.G. 14, 1169BC), Origen/Rufinus interprets the verb 'to evangelize' as meaning 'to announce good things'. The exact nature of these 'good things' is then specified in a list of credal articles which the *bonus nuntius* must preach. The relationship between the Father and the Son is top of the list. The orthodox position is contrasted with that of two heretical groups. We meet again Origen's old enemies, the Monarchians, who deny the Trinity in favour of a strict unitarianism.

The Monarchians are joined by another group who are guilty of the opposite heresy, namely believing that the Father and the Son are different in nature and in substance:

*aut enim male separant Filium a Patre, ut alterius naturae Patrem, alterius Filium dicant: aut male confundunt, ut vel ex tribus compositum Deum, vel trinae tantummodo appellationis in eo esse vocabulum putent.*

The *bonus nuntius* must tread the narrow middle path between these two extremes. While allowing the Father and the Son their own individuality, he will nonetheless announce that they are ‘one substance’ and ‘one nature’: *qui autem bene annuntiat proprietates quidem Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto suas cuique dabit; nihil autem diversitatis esse confitebitur in substantia vel natura.* A little later, Origen/Rufinus epitomizes the orthodox position by claiming that *naturam Trinitatis et substantiam unam esse.*

What are we to make of this passage? Is Rufinus providing a faithful translation of Origen’s Greek text for the benefit of his Roman readers, or is he once again skewing the original argument to suit the critical tastes of the pro-Nicenes? It seems to me much more likely that this passage is another example of Rufinus’ well-intended textual emendations. The arguments of this chapter and of chapter 1 have shown that Origen vehemently refuted the belief that there was only one substance or one nature in the Trinity. This was the Monarchian heresy. Moreover, it is hard to identify a group of heretics in existence in the mid-third century who claimed that the Father and Son were ‘different in nature and in substance’ (*alterius naturae Patrem, alterius Filium dicant*). Or, rather, this belief was not a heresy. It was the conventional Trinitarian paradigm, which Origen himself espouses throughout his works. It is highly unlikely that Origen would place this belief in the same heretical category as Monarchianism.<sup>141</sup>

Delarue, the editor of the Patrology edition of the *Commentary on Romans* suspects an interpolation by Rufinus. He suggests that the first group of heretics, who separate the Father from the Son and argue that they are different in nature (*male separant Filium a Patre, ut alterius naturae Patrem, alterius Filium dicant*), are the Arians<sup>142</sup> and that it is in response to this new heresy that Rufinus insists that the Father and the Son are one nature and one substance. Many of the arguments of this passage from the *Commentary on Romans* are much better suited to the theological controversies of Rufinus’ day than to

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<sup>141</sup> It is possible, even likely, that in this passage Rufinus is reporting the views of Origen himself and ascribing them to anonymous heretics. The reader is referred to the famously controversial passage at *Commentary on Romans* 5.10, where it appears that Rufinus has followed exactly this technique: Origen’s doctrine of the possibility of a second fall is reported third-hand (*aiunt enim . . .*) and then refuted.

the mid-third century. It seems undeniable that Rufinus has substantially added to this excerpt to give it a greater contemporary relevance. By the time that Rufinus came to translate the *Commentary on Romans*, it was imperative that the ‘good preacher’ did not fall into Arianism.

We must also take careful note of the use of the term *proprietates* in this passage.<sup>143</sup> Origen/Rufinus insists that the ‘good preacher’ must allow the Father, Son and Holy Ghost his own *proprietates* (*proprietates quidem Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto suas cuique dabit*). So far, so good. One of Origen’s main complaints against the Monarchians is their refusal to allow the Father, Son and Holy Ghost their own *ιδιότης* (see especially *Commentary on St John* 2.2 and fragment 37). But the further claim that the ‘good preacher’ will not admit any distinction of substance or nature (*nihil autem diversitatis esse confitebitur in substantia vel natura*) is a glaring contradiction of the first claim. For Origen, the term *ιδιότης* does not refer to personal qualities that distinguish particular individuals,<sup>144</sup> but to generic characteristics shared by and common to a whole group (*οὐσία*).<sup>145</sup> In the context of Origen’s semantic framework, it would be impossible to claim (a) that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are one *substantia* (*οὐσία*), but (b) that each has its own *proprietates* (*ιδιότης*). As Orbe puts it, ‘una οὐσία, una ιδιότης.’<sup>146</sup> Rufinus has obviously altered the original text of this passage and put a post-Nicene ‘spin’ on the crucial and controversial term *proprietates* (*ιδιότης*).

I am similarly suspicious of a passage from the *Homilies on Numbers*, singled out by Stead as proving Origen’s orthodox tendencies.<sup>147</sup> Origen’s 12<sup>th</sup> Homily on the Book of Numbers takes the form of a detailed exegesis of the Lord’s command to Moses – *Gather the people together and I will give them water* (Numbers 21.16). Origen/Rufinus begins by reminding his congregation that water is an extremely common Biblical metaphor for the nourishment given by God to the faithful. Solomon’s advice to his son – *bibe aquas de puteorum tuorum fonte* (Proverbs 5.15) – is singled out for particular discussion. The crucial point in this short verse is that Solomon speaks of one spring (*fons*), but many wells (*putei*). Origen/Rufinus interprets the verse as a reference to the Trinity, in which there is one source or spring for the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Stead is correct to point out that the image does *not* imply that the Father is the spring of divinity, the cause of existence for the Son and the Holy

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<sup>142</sup> *forte Ariani?*

<sup>143</sup> This is the Latin translation of the Greek *ιδιότης*.

<sup>144</sup> During the Arian Controversy, the term came to have precisely this meaning.

<sup>145</sup> See chapter 1, section 5.4 and 6.2 and section 4.1 of this chapter.

<sup>146</sup> Orbe (1991), p.43.

<sup>147</sup> Stead (1977), p.214 and pp.249-50 trusts Rufinus’ translation.

Ghost. Origen/Rufinus is explicit that the Father himself is a well (*puteus*). The theory developed here is that of a prior, superior source providing existence and divinity for all three persons.<sup>148</sup>

I am extremely wary of the argument of this passage, which seems at such variance with Origen's usual Trinitarian paradigm. Nowhere else in his extant oeuvre does Origen suggest the existence of a primeval *Gott-grund* from which the Trinity emerges. As we have seen, it is Origen's emphatic belief that the unbegotten Father is the one and only cause of existence for the Son and the Holy Ghost.<sup>149</sup>

The idea of a cause prior to even the Father seems very odd indeed in the context of Origen's overall theology. What follows is more doubtful still. Having identified the three wells with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Origen/Rufinus reaches his dramatic conclusion: *est ergo haec trium distinctio personarum in Patri et Filio et Spiritu Sancto, quae ad pluralem puteorum numerum revocatur. sed horum puteorum unus est fons. una enim substantia est et natura Trinitatis* (in *Num. Hom.* 12.1).

In this passage, Rufinus once again presents Origen as the great defender of Nicene orthodoxy. The central triumph of the Council of Nicaea, the 'three persons and one substance' formula, is boldly prominent. But it seems odd indeed in the mouth of an ante-Nicene Greek theologian. As we have repeatedly argued, it was only the Arian Controversy that forced the theologians of the East to accept this controversial formula. In the period before 325, there was no need for such a formula, indeed great danger in it. Moreover, if we recall that Origen used the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις as synonyms, it becomes extremely difficult to reconstruct the original Greek of the phrase *distinctio personarum* in juxtaposition to the phrase *una substantia*.<sup>150</sup>

I cannot therefore accept the accuracy of Rufinus' translation of this passage from the *Homilies on Numbers*. It seems obvious to me that a major revision has taken place. In particular, I strongly disagree with Stead's gloss that Origen did, at times, believe that there was one substance in the Trinity.<sup>151</sup> Stead cites this passage in support of the authenticity of the controversial *Commentary on Hebrews* fragment, i.e. in corroboration of the ὁμοούσιος claim. I have an entirely different interpretation. The passage from the *Homilies on Numbers* discussed above seems to me to provide

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<sup>148</sup> Stead (1977), p.249-50.

<sup>149</sup> This Trinitarian paradigm is most clearly developed in the *Commentary on St John* and the *de Principiis*. See chapter 1, sections 10.1-10.2 for a full discussion of the relevant passages.

<sup>150</sup> It might be thought that Rufinus was translating the term πρόσωπον as *persona*, but an exhaustive analysis of the indices to Origen's works has revealed that he never uses the term πρόσωπον in a Trinitarian context. Indeed, as Bigg (1913), pp.73-4 has pointed out, the term was used by the Monarchians to describe the various masks assumed by the unitarian God; for this reason it was studiously avoided by the 'orthodox'.

further proof of Rufinus' willingness to alter Origen's original text to suit the suspicious ears of his Roman readers.

I have further doubts about Rufinus' translation of Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 3.12, where we read that *idem namque ipse qui ibi Trinitas propter distinctionem personarum, hic Deus intelligitur pro unitate substantiae*.<sup>152</sup> Rufinus' version of *de Principiis* 1.2.6 is similarly suspicious. Having compared the begetting of the Son to the birth of Seth from Adam, Origen/Rufinus tells us that the image illustrates the unity of nature and substance that pertains between the first two persons of the Trinity: *quae imago etiam naturae ac substantiae Patris et Filii continet unitatem*.<sup>153</sup> Finally, in his translation of Origen's 13<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Leviticus*, Rufinus inserts an overtly Nicene exegesis of the shewbread commandments (Leviticus 24.5-8). After a detailed analysis of the exact proportions of flour to be used in each loaf, Rufinus concludes that the shewbread is obviously an allegory for the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son have one will and one substance (they are 'one loaf'), but are two distinct persons (each loaf is made from 'two-tenths of flour'): *nunc autem 'unus' quidem est 'panis' – una enim voluntas est et una substantia – sed 'duae' sunt 'positiones', id est duae personarum proprietates* (*Homilies on Leviticus* 13.4).<sup>154</sup> Once again, both the argument and the terminology of this passage are blatantly anachronistic.

It is my belief that in each of the above passages Rufinus has taken great liberties with the text of Origen. So keen is he to vindicate his master from the posthumous slurs of Epiphanius and Jerome that Rufinus alters the entire argument of various key passages. Rufinus' 'translations' are so firmly couched in the language of orthodox propaganda that we must surely doubt the integrity of the translator. More importantly, the works of Origen which survive in the original Greek openly contradict the claims made in the above passages. The battle with Monarchianism was Origen's life's work. It was in deliberate refutation of unitarianism that Origen developed his Trinitarian paradigm of three individual and distinct οὐσῑαι. By suggesting that Origen pre-empted the Nicene doctrine of consubstantiality, Rufinus has distorted beyond recognition one of the most important theologians of the Early Church.

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<sup>151</sup> Stead (1977), p.214.

<sup>152</sup> Bigg (1913), p.203 rightly suspects 'the hand of Rufinus'.

<sup>153</sup> Stead (1977), p.214 accepts Rufinus' translation as genuine.

<sup>154</sup> Oddly, Scherer (1960), p.30 and Bigg (1913), p.218 accept this passage as a faithful translation of the original Greek text.

## ORIGEN'S CHRISTOLOGY IN CONTEXT

### INTRODUCTION.

#### 1.1.

Origen devotes the sixth chapter of the second book of the *de Principiis* to a description and explanation of the Incarnation. At 2.6.2, he states that Christ had both a divine and a human nature: *in uno eodemque ita utriusque naturae veritas*.<sup>1</sup> The Saviour's divine nature is proved (*testatur*) by the evidence of his many miracles, most importantly the miracle of the Resurrection. His human nature is proved (*testatur*) by the fact that he had a physical body, that he was seen as a man in Judaea, that he was born from a woman's womb, that he cried like any other baby, that he was troubled and, finally, that he died. Origen is rather fond of distributing in this way the various thoughts, words and deeds ascribed to Christ by the Evangelists. It is according to his human nature that Christ feels tired and falls asleep;<sup>2</sup> it is his human nature that is tempted,<sup>3</sup> that experiences the Agony in the Garden<sup>4</sup> and that feels emotional and physical suffering;<sup>5</sup> it is because of his human nature that he is unable to carry the Cross and needs the help of Simon of Cyrene;<sup>6</sup> it is his human nature that is crucified and dies<sup>7</sup> and that is resurrected and glorified.<sup>8</sup> The experiences of each nature are peculiar and specific. At *Contra Celsum* 4.15, for example, Origen insists that the Saviour's divine nature suffered none of those things suffered by his body or soul. It is according to this distinction of Christ's two natures that Origen feels able to explain the differences between the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel. Matthew, Mark and Luke are much more interested in Christ's human nature than in his divinity. This is obvious from the way in which they begin their accounts with elaborate genealogies. St. John is much more interested in Christ's divine nature, hence his Gospel begins with a complex discussion of the Logos.<sup>9</sup> This different

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<sup>1</sup> For an elaboration of this belief in the two natures of Christ, see the long 'Creed' at *Commentary on St. John* 32.16 (9), aimed at both the Adoptionists and the Docetics.

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Saint Matthew*, Frag. 3.21-35.

<sup>3</sup> *divinitas autem intentabilis erat* (*Commentary Series on Saint Matthew* 92); *manifestum, non Deum, sed hominem fuisse tentatum* (*Homily on St. Luke* 29).

<sup>4</sup> *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* 92.

<sup>5</sup> *de Principiis* 4.4.4. and *Contra Celsum* 2.9.

<sup>6</sup> *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* 126.

<sup>7</sup> *Commentary on St. John* 32.25 (17).

<sup>8</sup> *Commentary on St. John* 32.25 (17).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *Contra Celsum* 4.77.



focus explains why the Temptation and the Agony, experiences peculiar to Christ's humanity, figure so prominently in the first three Gospels, but are entirely missing from the fourth.<sup>10</sup>

To distinguish in this way Christ's human and divine nature can be a helpful exegetical tool, used to explain various 'problem' texts in the Bible.<sup>11</sup> When, for example, Celsus ridicules the fact that the one whom the Christians call God was afraid and ran away (John 12.54), Origen can reply that the retreat to Ephraim was an act of Christ's human nature.<sup>12</sup> Christ's physical and emotional distress can be explained in the same way. Origen even manages to turn such 'problem' passages to his positive advantage. As proof of the Saviour's genuine humanity, they can be quoted in refutation of the docetic heresy.<sup>13</sup>

Neat though it is, however, there are some problems involved in this Christological paradigm. It might first be objected that Origen is positing a kind of proto-Nestorianism, a Christological dualism, according to which Christ acts alternately as God or as man. This method would seem to upset and to undermine the fundamental unity of Christ's person and to ascribe to him two distinct and very different *loci* of action.<sup>14</sup> But it was not really until the fifth century that theologians began to concern themselves with the question of the unity of Christ's person. A much more worrying problem is what 'happens to' Christ's divine nature when he is acting solely according to his humanity. When, as a man, he is ignorant, where is his divine omniscience? When, as a man, he is being tempted, where is the perfect goodness of his divine nature? When, as a man, he is being arrested and crucified, where is his divine omnipotence?

1.2.

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<sup>10</sup> *notandum est autem quoniam Marcus quidem Lucas hoc ipsum (scil. the Agony) scripserunt, qui et tentantum exponunt a diabolo Iesum. Ioannes autem passionem quidem exponit, quemadmodum alii: orantem Iesum ut transiret ab eo calix non introducit, sicut nec tentantum exponit a diabolo Iesum. causam autem hanc arbitror esse, quoniam hi quidem magis secundum humanam eius naturam exponit de eo quam secundum divinam; Ioannes autem magis secundum divinam quam secundum humanam interpretatur naturam; divinitas autem intentabilis erat. ideo tres quidem evangelistae exposuerunt tentatum. Ioannes autem secundum quod coeperat - 'In principio erat Verbum' - nescit Deum Vebum posse tentari. sic et hic tres quidem isti retulerunt Iesum postulasse a Patre ut transiret calix ab eo, quoniam et proprium hominis erat, quantum ad infirmitatem pertinet carnis, velle evadere passionem. Ioannes autem, propositum habens exponere Iesum Verbum Deum, sciens quia ipse est vita et resurrectio, nescit Deum impassibilem refugere passionem (Commentary Series on St Matthew 92).*

<sup>11</sup> So de Faye (1923) III, p.133.

<sup>12</sup> *Contra Celsum* 2.9.

<sup>13</sup> About the fact, for example, that the Saviour is tired and falls asleep, Origen can conclude: *quia vere humanum portabat corpus quod corruptibile induerat, ipse corpore dormit (Homilies on St. Matthew Frag. 2.28-29)*. Similarly, the Agony in the Garden becomes proof of the full reality of the Saviour's human body: *suscipiens enim naturam carnis humanae, omnes proprietates implevit, ut non in phantasia habuisse carnem existimaretur, sed in veritate (Commentary Series on St. Matthew 92)*.

<sup>14</sup> So Bicknell (1950), p. 83 and Madigan (2003), pp.263-4.

At this point it must be noted that Origen's understanding of kenosis does not allow that the Logos was permanently emptied of any of its divine attributes. In the preface to the *de Principiis*, Origen emphatically states that the Incarnated Christ remained what he was, namely God,<sup>15</sup> and at 4.4.3, it is explicitly denied that the Logos lacked or lost any of its divine qualities.<sup>16</sup> The same is said at *Contra Celsum* 4.15: ὁ λόγος τῇ οὐσίᾳ μένων λόγος.<sup>17</sup> Most of the time, Origen is content to gloss Philippians 2.7 as a reference to the Incarnation *tout court*, simply as a recognition of the fact that the Logos was born as man.<sup>18</sup> In these passages, Origen will not specify what exactly this 'emptying' means, if anything. Indeed, at *de Principiis* 1.2.8, Origen interprets the kenosis as the revealing of the fullness of the Godhead: *exaniens se filius, qui erat in forma dei, per ipsam sui exanationem studet nobis deitatis plenitudinem demonstrare*.

However, in the *Homilies on Saint Luke*, Origen seems to accept that at the Incarnation the Logos really did empty itself of something, namely wisdom. Origen's comments form part of a gloss on Luke 2.40: *the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom*. This verse has always caused problems for exegetes: how can the omniscient Son of God be 'filled with wisdom'? At the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> Homily, Origen remarks that the Evangelist is certainly not describing the development of an ordinary child: before the boy was forty days old he had received full wisdom.<sup>19</sup> In the following Homily, Origen similarly argues that human nature does not allow a child under the age of twelve to be 'filled with wisdom'.<sup>20</sup> Origen explains this extraordinary precocity as Christ's re-filling what had previously been emptied '*evacuaverat se*' *Filius Dei, et propterea rursum completur sapientia. 'et gratia Dei erat super eum'. non quando venit ad adolescentiam, non quando manifeste docebat, sed adhuc cum esset parvulus, habebat gratiam Dei; et quomodo omnia in illo mirabilia fuerat, ita et pueritia mirabilis fuit, ut Dei sapientia compleretur* (in *Luc. Hom.* 19.2). The crucial point here is that

<sup>15</sup> *novis temporibus se ipsum exaniens homo factus est, incarnatus est, cum deus esset, et homo factus mansit quod erat, deus* (*de Principiis*, preface 4).

<sup>16</sup> *ut neque aliquid deitatis in Christo defuisse credatur*.

<sup>17</sup> Henry (1957), col. 61, refers us to *Contra Celsum* 4.18 and in *Lev. Hom.* 2.3 - (*quamvis enim vilem servi gesserit formam, plenitudo tamen in eo divinitatis habitabat*) - for the same argument. He concludes that 'le fait kenotique central, c'est l'Incarnation même. Nulle part, chez Origène, il n'y a trace, à propos Phil. 2.5-11, d'une théorie kenotique suivant laquelle le Christ, en s'incarnant, se serait vidé d'attributs divins.'

<sup>18</sup> *de Principiis* – preface 4, 1.2.8, 2.6.1; *Contra Celsum* 6.7; *Commentary Series on Saint Matthew* 135. This was the usual Patristic position. So, Pannenberg (1968), 308: Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine all 'connected Phil 2.7 to the coming of the Logos in the flesh (and) meant by the term 'kenosis' the assumption of human nature, but not the complete or partial relinquishment of the divine nature or its attributes.'

<sup>19</sup> *nec dum quadraginta dies purgationis impleverat, necdum Nazareth venerat, et iam totam sapientiam recipiebat* (in *Luc. Hom.* 18.1).

the kenosis is only temporary. Christ very quickly replaces anything that had been lost.<sup>21</sup> The same conclusion is reached in the *Homilies on Jeremiah* (1.7). Christ emptied himself and took up the form of a servant, but this ‘emptied’ state is restricted to his early childhood: εἰ γὰρ ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτὸν καταβαίνων ἐν ταῦθα, καὶ κενώσας ἑαυτὸν ἐλάμβανε πάλιν ταῦτα ἀφ’ ὧν ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτὸν ἐκὼν κενώσας ἑαυτὸν, τί ἄτοπον αὐτὸν καὶ προκεκοφέναι σοφίᾳ καὶ ἡλικίᾳ καὶ χάριτι παρὰ θεῶ καὶ ἀνθρώποις;<sup>22</sup>

Joseph Leinhard<sup>23</sup> draws attention to two passages in the *Homilies on St Luke* where Origen claims that the Christ child merely *pretended* to act like an ordinary boy (according to his human nature). In the Temple, Christ asked questions of the rabbis, rather than answering them, so that he could teach future generations a valuable moral lesson, i.e. the need for young children, however bright, to respect their teachers.<sup>24</sup> Christ assumes the rôle of the humble child for this simple didactic purpose. He appears to be asking questions, but is really teaching. There is nothing that Christ needs to learn.<sup>25</sup> Leinhard concludes that “some (of Christ’s) actions appear to be human, but only because (he) willed them so. In general, his deity controls his actions.” This is the major characteristic of Origen’s Christology. In the following chapter, we examine the ways in which Origen constantly subordinates the Saviour’s humanity to his divinity. The former is merely a mouthpiece or puppet of the latter.

There is one other important passage which cannot be ignored in this discussion. At *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* 55, Origen considers Christ’s claim that not even he knows the date of the Parousia (Matthew 24.36). In his gloss, Origen seems to accept that the Saviour might be genuinely

<sup>20</sup> *hoc hominum natura non recipit, ut ante duodecim annos sapientia compleatur (in Luc. Hom. 19.1).*

<sup>21</sup> Leinhard (1993), p.290 refers us to *in Luc.Hom. 20.6* for the same argument: *quoniam evacuaverat se formam servi accipiens, id quod amiserat resumerat, et replebatur virtutibus, quas, paulo ante assumptio corpore, visus fuerat relinquere.* The reader is also referred to the 12<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Leviticus*, where Origen interprets the verse in an explicitly anti-kenotic sense: *the boy ‘grew in spirit’ on account of the many great works which he had done (in Lev. Hom. 12.2).* That is to say, the Evangelist is describing the gradual manifestation of the Christ Child’s divine nature.

<sup>22</sup> We should note in this passage Origen’s emphasis on the voluntary nature of the kenosis. The impression given is of an entirely conscious and calculated decision to empty and to refill. Origen’s addition of ἐκὼν to Phil. 2.7 is highlighted by Lyman (1994), p.77. The passage from the *Homilies on Jeremiah* is also discussed by Raven (1923), pp. 28-9. Raven agrees that Origen’s Christology is not kenotic.

<sup>23</sup> Leinhard (1993), pp.290-1.

<sup>24</sup> *quoniam vero parvulus erat, invenitur in medio praeceptorum, sanctificans et erudiens eos. quia parvulus erat, invenitur in medio, non eos docens, sed interrogans, et pro aetatis officio, ut nos doceret quid pueris, quamvis sapientes et eruditi sint, conveniret, ut audiant potius magistros, quam docere desiderant, et se vana ostentatione non iactent. interrogabat, inquam, magistros, non ut aliquid disceret, sed ut interrogans erudiret (in Luc. Hom. 19.6).*

<sup>25</sup> *profuit Iesus magistris suis, et eos quos interrogare videbatur, docuit in medio eorum loquens, et quodammodo concitabat eos ad queres locorum, utrum scirent, an ignorarent, posse non poterant (in Luc. Hom. 20.1).*

ignorant of the day and the hour, but – and this is the crux of the exegesis – this ignorance is restricted to his humanity. There is no suggestion that the Logos was unaware of the Father’s plans: *homo qui . . . proficiens proficiebat quidem super omnes scientia et sapientia, non tamen ut veniret iam quod erat perfectum, priusquam propriam dispensationem impleret. nihil ergo mirum est, si hoc solum nescivit ex omnibus, id est diem consummationis et horam.* But Origen is not satisfied with this exegesis and suggests at least four other possible interpretations.<sup>26</sup>

We can safely conclude that Origen believed that Jesus of Nazareth was God, that the Logos itself was incarnated. Moreover, there is no suggestion that the Logos was *permanently* emptied of any of its divine powers. When Celsus complains that the Incarnation must have involved a change for the worse, Origen insists that God is always God.<sup>27</sup> The Incarnation meant simply the assuming of a human body.

### 1.3

Although the nature of God is unchangeable, the way he reveals himself changes constantly. One and the same God appears in a variety of different ways to suit our different needs.<sup>28</sup> The Incarnation is the supreme example of this providential accommodation. Although Origen’s Christ was in full and conscious possession of all his divine powers, fallen man would have been unable to bear the full revelation of this divinity. To those unable to understand God as God, he appeared as man.<sup>29</sup> This does not mean that the Incarnation, the assuming of a human body, diminished the divinity of the Logos; it simply veiled it. Harl draws attention to an important passage in the *Commentary on St Matthew* in which Philippians 2.9 is interpreted as the measuring out God’s divine powers (μέτρον δυνάμεως) to suit the capacity of the world (ὁ ἐχώρει τὰ ἐν κόσμῳ πράγματα).<sup>30</sup> We find similar arguments in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. The divinity of the Incarnated Christ appeared as merely a ‘drop of myrrh’ or a ‘stone of the mountain’. We should have been unable to bear any more than this: *si ergo videris Salvatorem meum ad terrena et humilia descendentem, videbis quomodo a virtute magna et maiestate divina ad nos modica quaedam stilla defluerit . . . nec poterat humana fragilitas totius montis magnitudinem capere, sed lapsis offensionis, petra scandali descendit in mundum* (in *Cant. Hom.* 2.3). It

<sup>26</sup> (1) That Christ is warning the disciples not to believe those who claim to know when the world will end; (2) that God has not yet decided the date of the Parousia; (3) that in this passage ‘Christ’ is to be understood as ‘the Church’; (4) that it would not benefit the disciples to know the date and that it is for this reason that Christ *feigns* ignorance.

<sup>27</sup> ὁ λόγος τῇ οὐσίᾳ μένων λόγος (*Contra Celsum* 4.15).

<sup>28</sup> It is with this in mind that Origen develops his famous theory of the ἐπίνοιαί of Christ. We discuss this below, sections 5.3-5.4.

<sup>29</sup> This point is well discussed by Harl (1957), pp. 201-4 and 228-233.

<sup>30</sup> *Commentary on St Matthew* 11.17.

is for this reason that Origen claims, in the *Commentary on St John*, that the divinity of the Incarnated Christ was merely a shadow of the Godhead.<sup>31</sup>

The doctrine of the Incarnation as providential accommodation to the weakness of fallen man is extremely important to Origen. He repeatedly insists that the figure of the Incarnated Redeemer is simply a necessary first step in our understanding of God.<sup>32</sup> The mature Christian will transcend the (dis)guise of assumed humanity and see God as God. In this sense it is true to say, with Harl, Girod and Chadwick,<sup>33</sup> that the Incarnation hid God as much as it revealed him. But this is not a kenotic theory. It does not mean that Christ was emptied of any divine powers. It is simply that the Saviour is deciding how much of his divinity to reveal, when and to whom. At the Transfiguration, for example, Christ has decided that three of the disciples are capable and worthy of witnessing his full divine glory.<sup>34</sup>

#### 1.4

But if the Incarnated Christ retained all the attributes of his divinity, how would it ever have been possible for him to experience life wholly and simply as a man? How can Origen claim that the Agony in the Garden, the Temptation and the Passion are experiences peculiar to Christ's human nature? In the *Commentary Series on Saint Matthew*, Origen seems to be arguing that at certain times Christ took the deliberate and conscious decision to 'switch off' his divinity, to 'put it to sleep'. In Gethsemane, Christ consciously restrains his divine powers and allows himself to be arrested by the soldiers: *Christus, qui post tanta prodigia et virtutes quas fecit volens tradidit se ad vincula. soporans in se divinitatis virtutem et adquiescens ut alligaretur* (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 115). This is not a kenosis. The Saviour has not lost any of his divine power; he is simply choosing not to use it.<sup>35</sup> We are back to the doctrine of providential accommodation, the decision to reveal only a 'measure' of divinity. A crucial point in Origen's exegesis of the Passion is that Christ remains consciously aware of the fact that he is God. As such, he always had the ability to avoid the Passion. Had Christ not actively *wanted*

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<sup>31</sup> *Commentary on St John* 2.6 (4). Passage cited in Harl (1957), p.197.

<sup>32</sup> For more on this, see sections 5.3-5.4.

<sup>33</sup> Chadwick (1953), ad loc. *Contra Celsum* 2.67: ἐπέμθη γὰρ οὐ μόνον, ἵνα γνωσθῇ, ἀλλ' ἵνα καὶ λάθῃ. He refers to *Contra Celsum* 2.72, 4.15 and 4.19 for similar claims. Girod (1970), p.64 speaks of the 'ambiguïté' involved in Origen's doctrine of the Incarnation: 'la chair du Fils est une manifestation visible, mais en fait elle est aussi un obstacle à la découverte de la divinité.'

<sup>34</sup> On this, see especially *Contra Celsum* 2.64, 4.16 and 6.68. For a full discussion, see section 5.4.

<sup>35</sup> Origen's argument here is similar to Irenaeus's idea of the 'quiescence' of the Saviour's divine attributes. For a discussion, see Hall (1898), p.3.

to be arrested, imprisoned and crucified, the efforts of the Roman soldiers would have been to no avail.<sup>36</sup>

Origen's Christ never forgets that he is God and, as such, omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good. At any moment he chooses, Christ can call upon these divine powers. There are in fact no situations in which Origen allows Christ to act wholly as a man and to ignore completely his divine nature. It is the argument of this chapter that, for Origen, it is Christ's divine nature that directs and dictates the whole course of his earthly life. Despite claiming that Christ experienced the Temptation and the Agony as a man, Origen's exegesis of these episodes reveals Christ making full use of his divinity. Even his death is seen as the supreme manifestation of the Saviour's miraculous powers. Origen's Christ constantly exploits the advantages of his divinity.

In the second half of this chapter, we discuss Origen's exegesis of three crucial episodes in the life of Christ, the Temptation, the Agony and the Crucifixion, as an illustration of this Christological bias.<sup>37</sup> We also discuss in detail the arguments of *de Principiis* 2.6, the philosophical foundation for this Christology: this chapter describes the process by which the Saviour's humanity was entirely absorbed by his divinity.<sup>38</sup> We shall also see how Origen's understanding of the Redemption and the Atonement leaves very little soteriological scope for the Saviour's humanity.<sup>39</sup>

## CHRISTOLOGY AS AN HISTORICALLY SENSITIVE PHENOMENON.

### 2.1.

This emphasis on the Saviour's divinity is of course a Patristic common-place. The Fathers of the Church are often accused *en masse* of refusing to recognize the vital contribution made by Christ's human nature. Although the Church might always have insisted upon the recognition of the two natures of Christ, it is the prerogative of each age to concentrate upon and to emphasize either the humanity or the divinity of the Saviour. Christology is very much an historically sensitive phenomenon, the delicate barometer of external circumstance. It is well known, for example, that the poets, artists and theologians of the later Middle Ages in the West concentrated to an unprecedented degree on the figure of the Suffering Servant. For them, it was the Saviour's human nature that was most important. This bias was obviously the direct response to the bleakness of the contemporary situation. The fall of Jerusalem, the failure of the Third Crusade and the ravages of the Black Death led men to seek the

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<sup>36</sup> In sections 16.1-16.3, we look in detail at Origen's doctrine of the Saviour's voluntary death.

<sup>37</sup> Sections 10.1-16.3.

<sup>38</sup> Sections 8.1-9.6.

comfort of a suffering and sympathetic Saviour.<sup>40</sup> A similar emphasis on the Saviour's humanity characterizes much modern theology. Various academics advocate an extreme de-mythologizing of the Gospel narrative and are explicitly rejecting such overtly 'divine' acts as the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection and the Ascension.<sup>41</sup> Even the average church-goer is much more likely to see Christ as a supremely virtuous man and as a rôle model for good behaviour than as God Incarnate.<sup>42</sup>

The Christology of the Early Church is characterized by the opposite tendency. Christians of the first five centuries felt it incumbent upon themselves to emphasize the divinity of Christ and to concentrate exclusively on his divine nature.<sup>43</sup> This bias is apparent not only in the works of philosophers and theologians, but also in Christian art and poetry.<sup>44</sup> For example, it was not until the sixth century that the Crucifixion became a popular subject for artists and even then the Cross was depicted as a golden, jewel encrusted *objet d'art*. Christian sculptors were similarly unwilling to produce realistic portraits of a Jewish outcast. Instead, they produced statues of beautiful, idealized youths, clean-shaven and muscular, not unlike the cult statues of young gods. The murals of the Catacombs were likewise dependent upon pagan religious iconography: Christ commonly appears as the god Pan.<sup>45</sup> Neither do the poets of this early period describe the pain and suffering of the Passion. The Crucifixion was a taboo subject.<sup>46</sup>

There are obvious historical explanations for this emphasis. Before the conversion of Constantine, the Church was a minority and persecuted group. Attacked and ridiculed by the pagans, it would not have helped the cause to admit that Christ was indeed a poor, weak and suffering man. The martyrs in the arena would be comforted not by recalling the suffering of Christ, but by concentrating on his mighty Resurrection and glorious Ascension.<sup>47</sup> Of course, after 312, the situation changed entirely and the Church became a privileged, national institution. A mood of great triumph permeated the Christian

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<sup>39</sup> Sections 5.1-7.5.

<sup>40</sup> On this, see Raby (1927), pp.417-457.

<sup>41</sup> The best examples of this de-mythologizing theology are Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith*, Robinson, *Honest to God*, Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology* and Cupitt, *Sea of Faith*. For an overview of the de-mythologizing agenda, see Meta (1966).

<sup>42</sup> Bicknell (1950), p.78 describes the average modern Englishman as an Adoptionist.

<sup>43</sup> Nock (1933), p.210: it was certainly not the human character of Christ, as described in the four Gospels, that converted the world; evangelism was rooted in the glorification of the Saviour's divine nature.

<sup>44</sup> For the manifestations of this tendency in the Carolingian era, see Chazelle (2001).

<sup>45</sup> See Munro and Rudorff (1961), p.61.

<sup>46</sup> Thierry (1972). In Thierry's anthology of Greek Christian poetry, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, there is not one that deals with the Passion. Raby (1927), pp. 1-111 gives a similar picture of early Latin poetry.

conscience for at least two centuries. Artists were urged to depict Christ in glory, Christ Pantocrator.<sup>48</sup>

Poets of both East and West hymned Christ as the triumphant, conquering hero.<sup>49</sup>

In the course of this study, it will emerge that Origen's Christology is very much in keeping with this general bias. Like all his contemporaries, Origen was very concerned to stress the divinity of Christ at the expense of his suffering humanity. For Origen, this was a vital aspect of the apologetic agenda. Origen's depiction of Christ was developed almost entirely as a response to the mockery of the pagans.

#### PAGAN POLEMIC AS A BACKGROUND TO ORIGEN'S CHRISTOLOGY.

##### 3.1.

It is impossible to understand Origen's Christology without first understanding the intellectual milieu in which he was writing. Origen's theological doctrines are almost always a reaction and a response to the views of others, be they heretical groups within the Church itself or its pagan opponents.

By the mid-second century, the pagan intelligentsia were finally beginning to take note of the intellectual threat of Christianity. For the first time, the faithful were facing the prospect of pagan philosophical attacks.<sup>50</sup> No longer was Christianity simply a nuisance to the law-keepers of the Empire,<sup>51</sup> but a fast-growing sect with converts from the highest echelons of educated society.<sup>52</sup> Criticisms of Christianity had previously been restricted to ridiculous accusations of love orgies, cannibalism and general anti-social behaviour. The claims were not particularly intelligent and were certainly not based upon even the slightest acquaintance with the Christian religion.<sup>53</sup> It was only later, with Galen, Celsus and Porphyry, that pagans felt sufficiently threatened by the new religion to launch systematic, *philosophical* attacks on its various doctrines. Origen's whole theological enterprise is inspired and prompted by such attacks. The apologetic mode may not always be explicit, but the very fact that Origen's explanation of the Christian religion is so rigorously philosophical is the direct result of his passionate engagement with its pagan critics and his realization that he must, so to speak, beat

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Luke's description of the martyrdom of St. Stephen (Acts 7.51) and Perpetua's vision of Christ in glory (*Passio* 4, 11-13).

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, the great mosaics of the Hagia Sophia.

<sup>49</sup> The *Te Deum*, written c. 400, is the perfect example of this: Christ is celebrated as the *rex gloriae*, not the Suffering Servant.

<sup>50</sup> For a brief overview of this crucial period, see Dodds (1965), p.106.

<sup>51</sup> From Pontius Pilate to Pliny, Roman Governors had been troubled by the social threat of Christianity. On this, see Benko (1980), pp.1056-1081 and Wilkes (1984), pp.1-30.

<sup>52</sup> Wilkes (1984), pp.127-9.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of these early anti-Christian arguments, see Hoffman (1994), pp. 137-145 and Grant (1988), pp.29-31.



them at their own game.<sup>54</sup> Ironically, it was the ferocity of the pagan opposition that galvanized Christians into becoming philosophers. Origen is a fine example of this new kind of believer: it has been argued that he was the first Christian theologian, the first to turn his religion into a coherent philosophical system.<sup>55</sup> The attacks of Celsus and his fellows forced Origen to take a fresh, *intellectual*, look at the central doctrines of faith.

Lebreton, in a long analysis of the first few centuries of Christianity, charts the gradual rise of philosophical speculation within the Church.<sup>56</sup> He cites Minucius Felix and Justin Martyr as inaugurating this important new approach to religion. They deliberately adopt the language of those whom they are seeking to convert: for the first time, philosophy has become an important apologetic tool. The next generation of Apologists further exploited the evangelical advantages of philosophy. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Novatian all made deliberate and systematic use of pagan philosophical categories in order to explain central Christian mysteries. I would categorize Origen's theology as very much part of this new approach to Christianity. Lebreton disagrees. He prefers to see Origen, together with Clement, as custodians of a secret *gnosis*, an arcane esoteric theology which was to be kept a closely guarded secret.<sup>57</sup> Of course there is an important element of élitism and secrecy in Origen's theological system, but it is an *intellectual* élitism.<sup>58</sup> Origen is a rigorous philosopher, saturated with Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. The spiritual élite which Origen favours are not muddle-headed mystics nor esoteric Gnostic adepts; they are intellectual heavy weights, enormously well read in both secular and sacred texts.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.2.

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<sup>54</sup> I disagree with Scheffczyk's claim (1969), p.82 that "Origen, though still associated with the tradition of the Apologists (c.f. the *Contra Celsum*) inaugurates a new approach to the Christian world." I would rather not separate in this way Origen's 'apologetic' method from his 'new' (= philosophical) approach to Christianity. The two are inextricably linked: it is precisely because he is defending Christianity against pagan philosophical attack that Origen is so concerned to make Christianity a coherent philosophical system.

<sup>55</sup> Jaeger (1962), p.49: "Philosophy penetrates (Origen's) whole understanding of the religion of Jesus and the Apostles, transforming it into theology."

<sup>56</sup> Lebreton (1925).

<sup>57</sup> Lebreton (1925), p. 492. See also Trigg (1981), Hanson (1954), pp.73-90 and Jaeger (1962), pp.66-7.

<sup>58</sup> Lot-Borodine (1932), p.531 recognizes that Origen's élitism is intellectual: "il est le vrai aristocrate . . . bien plus intellectualiste que moraliste, et qui établit une véritable barrière entre les *simpliciores* et les 'les vraie brebis de la maison d'Israël': aux uns les miettes, aux autres le pain."

<sup>59</sup> Gregory Thaumaturgos, *Panegyric* 13 is a detailed description of the wide-ranging curriculum of Origen's school. The important point to note is the centrality of pagan philosophical texts. See also Origen's *Letter to Gregory* (= *Philocalia* 13.1-2), in which he advises his pupil to study Greek philosophy as the perfect preparation for the understanding of Christianity. On this last point, see Heine (1993), p. 90.

In all his works, Origen is striving to distance himself from the blind belief of the *simpliciores* and to explain Christianity in philosophically coherent terms. This noble aim has overtly apologetic intentions. Origen's writings were not restricted to those already within the Church: their wide-ranging readership would almost certainly have included educated pagans, men and women ripe for conversion. We must remember that Alexandria in the second and third centuries after Christ was a bustling, cosmopolitan sea-port.<sup>60</sup> Inter-faith dialogue, amongst Christians, Jews and pagans, was a common phenomenon.<sup>61</sup> There is of course evidence that Origen was on friendly terms with the Jewish community: he was taught Hebrew by one of its Rabbis and was clearly influenced by Jewish allegorical exegesis.<sup>62</sup> Both Origen and his pagan contemporary, Plotinus, were intrigued by the religions of the East: it is tempting to detect a Buddhist influence on both thinkers.<sup>63</sup> We also know that Plotinus and Origen were on speaking terms with various Gnostics: Jerome, for example, quotes from a famous public debate between Origen and the Gnostic champion, Candidus.<sup>64</sup> Most important to the present enquiry, however, is the fact that Christians and pagans were in daily contact with one another. There seems to have been no 'ghetto-mentality' in this free thinking university town. It is possible that Origen studied in his youth under the pagan philosopher, Ammonius Saccas.<sup>65</sup> Conversely, we are told that Anatolios, a Christian, held the chair of mathematics.<sup>66</sup> There are at least three passages in the *Enneads* in which Plotinus appears to be attacking specifically Christian doctrines.<sup>67</sup> Celsus' attack on the Christians must be the fruit of years of enquiry, of a very close contact with various Christian

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<sup>60</sup> For a brief, but useful description of Origen's Alexandria, see Trigg (1983), pp.3-7.

<sup>61</sup> Stroumsa (2003) tries to refute what he calls the 'myth of multi-culturalism in Alexandria'. I am not convinced. Although his paper provides a useful insight into some religious and racial tensions, he ignores the all important traffic of intellectual ideas.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, the references to 'my Hebrew teacher' at *de Principiis* 1.3.4 and 4.3.14. For an exhaustive analysis of the influence of the Jews on Origen, see de Lange (1996).

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Porphyry's claim that the young Plotinus joined the Emperor Gordian's expedition in the hope of meeting the Brahmins (*Vita Plotini* 3). It is possible that the references to re-incarnation that are found in both Origen and Plotinus were in part suggested by the Buddhist doctrine of *karma* (Williams (1927), p. 215). More interestingly, Origen's doctrine of the ἐπίνοια of Christ (see sections 1.3, 5.3-5.4) is remarkably similar to the Buddhist doctrine of levels of enlightenment.

<sup>64</sup> Jerome, *Apologia contra Rufinum* 2.9. Plotinus, *Ennead* 2.9 (*Against the Gnostics*) reveals a detailed knowledge of his enemies' system. Origen is similarly knowledgeable (see especially the *verbatim* quotations from the Gnostic, Heracleon, in the *Commentary on St John*. Meredith (1985), Runia (1984) and Sinnige (1999) have shown how, despite such vociferous enmity, both Origen and Plotinus were in fact greatly influenced by the Gnostics.

<sup>65</sup> This is an immensely controversial subject, which cannot be discussed here. The interested reader is referred to Langerbeck (1957), Dodds (1960) and Edwards (1993).

<sup>66</sup> Bidez (1923), p.12.

<sup>67</sup> *Ennead* 3.2.8, 4.8.5 and 6.8.7. For a discussion of the last two passages, see Sinnige (1999), p.45 and Armstrong (1982).

groups.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, Origen almost certainly held public debates with his pagan *confrères*.<sup>69</sup>

We have indisputable evidence that educated pagans were present at the Mass for Catechumens. In the 13<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Genesis*, Origen addresses the pagans directly and notes that they will appreciate his familiarity with *saeculares litteras*.<sup>70</sup> It was this type of educated pagan whom Origen was most keen to convert.<sup>71</sup>

Like the Apologists, Origen recognized the immense value of philosophy for the conversion of educated pagans and for the establishment of Christianity as a respectable, intelligent religion. Eusebius has preserved a letter, written by Origen, in which he defends his liking for philosophy by stressing its evangelical potential:

ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀνακειμένῳ μοι τῷ λόγῳ, τῆς φήμης διατρεχούσης περὶ τῆς ἔξω ἡμῶν, προσήεσαν ὅτε μὲν αἰρετικοί, ὅτε δὲ οἱ ἀπὸ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν μαθημάτων καὶ μάλιστα τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ, ἔδοξεν ἐξετάσαι τὰ τε τῶν αἰρετικῶν δόγματα καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν φιλοσόφων περὶ ἀληθείας λέγειν ἐπαγγελλόμενα. τοῦτο δὲ πεποιήκαμεν μιμησάμενοί τε τὸν πρὸ ἡμῶν πολλοὺς ὠφελήσαντα Πάνταινον, οὐκ ὀλίγην ἐν ἐκείνοις ἐσχηκότα παρασκευήν, καὶ τὸν νῦν ἐν τῷ πρεσβυτερίῳ καθεζόμενον Ἀλεξανδρέων Ἡρακλᾶν, ὄντινα εὖρον παρὰ τῷ διδασκάλῳ τῶν φιλοσόφων μαθημάτων, ἤδη πέντε ἔτεσιν αὐτῷ προσκαρτερήσαντα πρὶν ἢ ἐμὲ ἄρξασθαι ἀκούειν ἐκείνων τῶν λόγων (Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.19).<sup>72</sup>

The pagans must not be allowed to mock. “Only believe” was no longer the rallying cry.<sup>73</sup> Unlike Tertullian, Origen realized that Jerusalem had a great deal to learn from Athens. Moses and Plato were not to be pitted against one another, but fused together to form an exciting, new and remarkably successful religion. In this ‘new religion’, there must be rational explanations for every doctrine. Belief must be subjected to the rigorous scrutiny of reason.<sup>74</sup> Van Winden has highlighted an important passage in the *Contra Celsum*, in which Origen explicitly responds to the charge that Christianity is

<sup>68</sup> Frede (1999), p.133 calls Celsus “surprisingly well-informed.”

<sup>69</sup> Chadwick (1953), p. ix suggests that the *Contra Celsum* is, at least in part, the fruit of real debates. Bardy (1923), p.14 agrees.

<sup>70</sup> Passage quoted by Bidez (1923), pp.12-13.

<sup>71</sup> It must have been a great disappointment that Origen failed to convert the philosopher Porphyry, who travelled all the way from Tyre to Caesarea to hear the great man speak (Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.19). But the very fact that Porphyry travelled such a distance for such a purpose tells us a great deal about pagan/Christian interaction. For a discussion of this, see Wilkes (1984), p.129.

<sup>72</sup> Dillon (1988), p.216 and (1992), p.8 describes the apologetic and evangelical advantages of Origen’s pagan philosophical education. He argues that Origen attended Ammonius’ lectures to ‘aid his apostolate to the Alexandrian intelligentsia.’

<sup>73</sup> *Contra Celsum* 1.9. Even Tertullian was proud to claim that *certum est quia impossibile est* and that *nobis curiositate opus non est post Christum Iesum*. Last passage cited by Dodds (1965), p.106.

<sup>74</sup> On this, see especially *Contra Celsum* 5.20. Harl (1957), pp.262-3 and Hovland (1984), pp.196-8 discuss this point.

founded upon πίστις rather than upon λόγος and ἀποδείξεις (*Contra Celsum* 1.10-11).<sup>75</sup> Origen's response contains two vitally important points. He admits that πίστις is the *modus credendi* of the mass of ordinary believers, of those who are unable to devote themselves to philosophical studies. But the mature, intellectual Christian will not be satisfied with belief *simpliciter*: his aim is πίστις μετὰ λόγον. Marguerite Harl has drawn attention to a little known fragment from Origen's *Commentary on I Corinthians*, in which we find a very similar argument.<sup>76</sup> In this passage, Origen draws a sharp distinction between 'wisdom' (σοφία) and 'faith' (πίστις). 'Wisdom' is vastly superior to 'faith'. It is to be revealed only to the intellectually astute. Taking his cue from St Paul, who will not entrust the heady mysteries of σοφία to the childlike Corinthians (I Corinthians 2.4-7), Origen epitomizes his famous 'two-tier' Christianity:

ἄλλο γάρ ἐστιν εἰσαγαγεῖν τινὰς εἰς τὴν πίστιν, ἄλλο τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀποκαλύπτειν. ἀναπτύσσομεν οὖν τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ θεοῦ οὐ τοῖς εἰσαγομένοις οὐδὲ τοῖς ἀρχομένοις οὐδὲ τοῖς μηδέπω ἀποδείξιν τοῦ ὑγιοῦς βίου δεδωκόσιν· ἀλλ' ὅτ' ἂν γυμνασάμενος ὄν δεῖ τρόπον τὰ αἰσθητήρια πρὸς διάκρισιν καλοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ ἐπιτήδειος γένηται καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι σοφίαν, τότε λαλοῦμεν σοφίαν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις (*Commentary on I Corinthians*, fragment IX in the *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1907), p.238).

It is against this background that we are to understand Origen's explanation of the Resurrection of the Body. This was a doctrine that particularly repulsed pagan opponents.<sup>77</sup> Origen is not content with the facile reply that everything is possible with God.<sup>78</sup> He must explain and defend his belief with reference to standard philosophical arguments, οὐκ ἀποφάσει ἀλλὰ καὶ λόγῳ (*Contra Celsum* 5.22).

Specifically, Origen makes use of the Stoic doctrine of the σπερματικός λόγος coupling it with St Paul's image of the grain and the wheat (I Corinthians 15.35-38).<sup>79</sup> Chadwick has drawn attention to *Contra Celsum* 3.41, 4.57 and 6.77, where Origen makes use of the philosophical doctrine of prime matter "in order to make the Resurrection of the Body intellectually respectable."<sup>80</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Van Winden (1966).

<sup>76</sup> Harl (1957), p.266.

<sup>77</sup> Frede (1997), p.231.

<sup>78</sup> Celsus scoffs that this was the typical reply to pagan enquiries (*Contra Celsum* 3.70). At *Contra Celsum* 5.20, Origen criticizes Celsus for learning about the Resurrection of the Body from those Christians who 'only believe', i.e. cannot explain the doctrine.

<sup>79</sup> This argument is also used at *Contra Celsum* 7.32. For discussions of Origen's doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body, see Grant (1952), pp.251-5, Chadwick (1948), Bynham (1995), pp.63-8 and Borret (1969), pp.70-71.

<sup>80</sup> Chadwick (1948), p.101.

Although he might not always have succeeded in his philosophization of the faith and although his views might not always have been acceptable to later orthodoxy, Origen certainly deserves the credit of looking at Christianity in a way that would later result in its lasting triumph as a world religion. It would cease to be the belief of illiterate fisherman and would become a complex theological system that could match and better any pagan alternative.

### 3.3.

This new, philosophical approach is epitomized in Origen's theology. Origen has abandoned the inscrutable Biblical Deity in favour of a God who could appeal to the most critical pagan audience. One of the corner-stones of Origen's theology is the belief that even God is bound by the law of reason: as such, there must be rational, philosophical explanations for all his acts. Many scholars have argued that the fundamental difference between paganism and Christianity in the first few centuries after Christ centred upon this very question of the rationality of God.<sup>81</sup> They have emphasized the contempt felt by pagan intellectuals, most famously Galen, for the blind faith of the Christians, their simple acceptance of the arbitrary will of God and the concomitant doctrine that all natural science was a vain conceit.<sup>82</sup> Galen posited a strong distinction between Jewish/Christian/Biblical theology and pagan/philosophical theology. Origen, however, refuses to fall into line. Although a Christian, he appears to reject the traditional theology of his co-religionists and to adopt rather the pagan model, according to which the freedom of God is constrained by the bridle of philosophical possibility.<sup>83</sup>

Origen agrees with the pagans that God is constrained by the laws of nature. This is an explicit rejection of Biblical theology. God's miraculous intervention in the day-to-day running of the physical world, his abrupt and unexpected subversion of the natural order, is a *leit-motif* of both the Old and New Testament. The Biblical God is inscrutable and incomprehensible, precisely because he does not conform to expected norms and acts in wildly unpredictable ways. Man must never attempt to understand God nor, interestingly, the world he has created. So in the Book of Job, the Lord answers the hero *out of the whirlwind* and warns against precisely this kind of vain curiosity: can Job explain the movements of the stars, the origin of light and darkness, the cause of rain, hail and snow, the

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<sup>81</sup> Dihle (1982), pp.1-19, Bregman (1984), p.217, Hovland (1984), p.196.

<sup>82</sup> Epitomized in Rabbi Gamaliel's discussion with the emperor of Rome. The Jew argues that everything that happens happens only because of the will of God and that it is therefore useless to attempt to understand or to explain the cosmos (cited in Dihle (1982), p.4). See also Walzer (1949), pp.25-28.

<sup>83</sup> I agree therefore with Bigg (1913), p. 201, who argues that, according to Origen, God's power is indeed limited, but limited only by his own reason and his own beneficence.

gestation period of wild goats (Job 39)? While pagan natural scientists were occupying themselves with exactly these sorts of question, the Jews and Christians were urged to suspend all curiosity.

Origen, however, will not accept that God is inscrutable and incomprehensible. On the contrary, he believes that God makes sense because he necessarily conforms to the laws of nature. The world in which we live was built upon the firm foundations of reason: as such, its aims and purposes are certainly within the scope of human comprehension. Origen seems to have been very strongly influenced by the Stoic idea that the meticulous providence of God extends to the *minutiae* of creation: there is, for example, a particular reason why particular stars occupy particular positions.<sup>84</sup> Although Origen believes that we shall only truly be able to *rerum cognoscere causas* in the after-life, the point remains that God's creation, in so far as it conforms to the dictates of reason, will be eventually understood by the creatures themselves.<sup>85</sup> God was not free to create as and what he liked, but was constrained by the laws of reason.

Robert Grant has drawn attention to an interesting passage from the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, in which Origen argues, *à propos* human physiognomy, that there is a reason and cause for everything and that it is man's duty to find out what that is (*in Jer. Hom.39*).<sup>86</sup> Grant argues that this passage is a direct response to Galen's *de usu partium*. In the *de usu partium*, Galen argues that there is a particular and precise reason why the human body was made in the way it is; every constituent part has its own function and purpose – even eyebrows. As we have seen, Galen regularly criticized Biblical cosmology as referring everything to the inscrutable will of God, thus dismissing any attempt at understanding creation. Origen refuses to accept this criticism: in the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, Origen repeats the argument of the *de usu partium*. His insistence that God's work can and must be understood places him firmly on the 'pagan' side of this debate.

This brief over-view of Origen's theology is the perfect illustration of his subjection of the Christian faith to the dictates of pagan philosophical reasoning. I believe that it was in direct response to the criticisms of Galen and his fellows that Origen altered so radically the traditional depiction of the Christian Deity. That is to say, Origen's theology is consciously and deliberately apologetic. In the next

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<sup>84</sup> The doctrine of meticulous providence is also of course a central tenet of Christianity, enshrined in the Bible (see, for example, Luke 12.6: *are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them is forgotten before God?*). It seems to me however that there is a very important difference between the Christian doctrine of meticulous providence and the pagan, particularly Stoic, version. Christians are not expected to understand, but simply to accept.

<sup>85</sup> These ideas are most fully developed at *de Principiis* 2.6.7 and 2.11.6-7. O'Clerigh (1992), p. 21 discusses this theory and agrees with me that it is Stoic in origin.

section of this chapter, we shall see how pagan criticisms of the Incarnation were the prick and spur to Origen's re-interpretation of this central Christian belief.

#### 4.1

For the pagan opponents of Christianity, the Incarnation was the most ridiculous aspect of the whole religion.<sup>87</sup> There were two main objections. The first was the philosophical absurdity that God ever would or could incarnate himself and the second was that the Christ of the Gospels behaved in a way entirely unsuited to his supposed divine nature. These were stock arguments of the anti-Christian polemic, used and re-used throughout antiquity.

The increasing dominance of Platonism in the second and third centuries AD led to a widespread emphasis on philosophical dualism. Although dualism had always been an important element in Greek thought, by this date it had become sufficiently propagated to become one of the most important philosophical doctrines.<sup>88</sup> This was particularly true of Origen's own intellectual milieu at Alexandria.<sup>89</sup> Matter and spirit, body and soul, the visible and the intelligible universes were seen as absolute opposites and, furthermore, were identified with the moral polarities of good and evil. Man in his present state was a fallen being, imprisoned in the shackles of the body as a punishment for some pre-carnate sin: it was his task and duty to escape the horrors of the physical universe and to return to the intelligible, spiritual world whence he came and where he truly belonged. Part of the popularity of dualism was that it could be used as a successful theodicy. In the *Timaeus*, for example, the imperfections of the physical world were blamed, not on the craftsman, but on the lousy material he was forced to use.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Grant (1983), p.535.

<sup>87</sup> Nock (1933), pp.236-7. As Frede (1997), pp.229-30 and 236-41 points out, Christianity and pagan philosophy were in many ways very compatible. He believes that there were only three major aspects of Christianity that were absolutely unacceptable to the pagan intelligentsia - the Resurrection of the Body, the Incarnation and Christ's behaviour and general attitude as described in the Gospels.

<sup>88</sup> Dualism began with the Pythagorean and Orphic religions. From there, it was adopted by Plato to form the backbone of many of his dialogues, especially the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedo*. The subsequent Academic tradition developed this doctrine to become (arguably) the corner-stone of its whole philosophy. Although the Stoics and Aristotelians were originally scornful of dualism, by the second and third centuries AD even they were becoming amenable to the idea. One of the most obvious examples of this shift is the re-interpretation of *de Anima* 3.5 to allow for the immortality of the soul. The quest for *homodoxia* in the first centuries after Christ forced peripatetic philosophers to abandon some of the fundamental beliefs of their master in favour of the tenets of Platonism. A similar development is apparent in Stoicism. Although the founders of the Stoic school were rigorously monist, by the third century even some Stoics were preaching a version of soul survival and escape from the wretched physical world. The Sceptics, Epicureans and Cynics remained untouched by dualism, but their doctrines by-passed the mainstream intellectual debate.

<sup>89</sup> On Alexandrian dualism – Gnostic, Plotinian and Origenist - see Meredith (1985).

<sup>90</sup> Bicknell (1950), p.58.

Within the context of such extreme dualism, the Incarnation would obviously seem an absurdity and an impiety. Pagan philosophy could make no sense of the idea that God would ever contaminate himself with the filth of matter. St. Augustine admits that in his youth he found the idea *turpe*; Celsus calls it αἰσχρόν.<sup>91</sup> Of course Origen was profoundly influenced by contemporary pagan philosophy. His dualist sympathies are well known and well documented.<sup>92</sup> Origen fully understood how the doctrine of the Incarnation could offend pagan sensibilities, sensibilities that were to a certain extent also his own. As both a philosopher and an apologist, Origen needed to find a way of accommodating the central Christian belief within the framework of metaphysical dualism. Origen's doctrine of the soul of Christ, as developed at *de Principiis* 2.6, is the perfect example of his valiant attempts to make the faith philosophically credible.<sup>93</sup> As we shall see when we come to discuss this important chapter,<sup>94</sup> Origen's main reason for believing that Christ assumed a human soul is in order to explain the process of the Incarnation. The Saviour's human soul plays the vital rôle of intermediary, allowing two fundamentally opposed entities (God and matter) to associate with one another. Origen's explanation of the mechanics of the process is entirely consistent with established philosophical doctrines. Few philosophers would have disagreed that a soul, by nature, is equally able to be united with God as to assume a body. The fall and return of souls was a story told by almost every philosopher Origen would have been likely to read. He is simply making new use of a very old theory.<sup>95</sup>

#### 4.2.

Although the doctrines of contemporary pagan philosophy would not allow God to become man,<sup>96</sup> it was still possible within the context of such systems to believe in divine men, in men inspired by God

<sup>91</sup> *Confessions* 5.10.19 and *Contra Celsum* 4.2 (both cited in Frede (1997), p.321).

<sup>92</sup> Especially by Meredith (1985). Origen's dualism is most obviously expressed in his belief that God did not originally intend to create the physical universe; he was obliged to do so only after the fall of souls (*de Principiis* 2.1.1-2; 2.9.1-2). It is also evident in his extreme wariness of taking the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body literally (*de Principiis* 2.10.1-4; 3.4.4 and *Contra Celsum* 5.17-19; 7.32; 8.49-50).

<sup>93</sup> Origen's predecessors made few attempts to explain the actual process of the Incarnation. So, Kelly (1977), pp.145-153.

<sup>94</sup> Sections 8.1-9.6.

<sup>95</sup> On this, see Stead (1994), pp. 189-90.

<sup>96</sup> I cannot accept the remarks of de Faye (1923), pp.136-7 that the Greeks were used to stories of incarnations and that the Eastern Church therefore had very little trouble with the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ. de Faye seems to be confusing incarnation with theophany. Of course the Greeks were very used to the former: from Homer onwards, their mythology was full of gods and goddesses appearing to men. But this is certainly not the same as God *becoming* man. Moreover, de Faye seems to have made the mistake of concentrating on the religion of the people rather than on the doctrines of the philosophers. It was the latter which shaped the theology of the Eastern Church.



and hence somehow in possession of supernatural powers.<sup>97</sup> Theoretically at least, pagan philosophers could have placed Christ in this category and ranked him alongside such luminaries as the much discussed Apollonius of Tyre.<sup>98</sup> In fact, however, it seemed all too obvious that the story of the life of Christ recorded in the four Gospels offered very little to suggest that he was anything like a divine man. Contrasts between (what was seen as) the wretched life of Christ and (what was seen as) the glorious life of divine men became a topos of the anti-Christian polemic. The pagan apologists also revived the old myths of divine epiphanies and made use of such stories as further ammunition against the Christians. We often find Christ unfavourably compared with Asklepius<sup>99</sup> and Dionysus.<sup>100</sup> Christ might have performed a few miracles,<sup>101</sup> but these were ridiculed as very small fry indeed compared with the fantastic feats of the pagan heroes.<sup>102</sup> The pagans also attacked the miracles of Christ as being inspired by evil demons. The streets and market places of the Eastern Empire were full of people levitating, disappearing, casting out demons and curing the sick; it was easy to see Christ as just another of these 'wizards'.<sup>103</sup> But by far the most worrying aspect of the life of Christ and the one totally unbecoming a divine man was the central episode of the Passion. It was a great help to the pagans to concentrate their attacks on the physical and mental suffering of Christ recorded in the four Gospels. Naturally, they ignore those episodes of his life, such as the Resurrection and the Ascension, which reveal the Saviour's divine nature. The pagans preferred to emphasize the Agony in the Garden, the Arraignment before Pilate and, most importantly, the Crucifixion, the most degrading form of execution. For pagan critics, the Passion revealed Christ as weak, pathetic and entirely human. Dionysus and Apollonius, who found themselves in very similar situations, show how gods *ought* to behave. Dionysus, imprisoned by Pentheus, breaks free to the accompaniment of an earthquake and a

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<sup>97</sup> Frede (1997), pp. 231-2, 235-6 and (1999), pp.144-5.

<sup>98</sup> Philostratus, the author of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyre*, was born c.172. After the publication of the *Life*, its hero became immensely popular and attracted a huge cult following. For his adoption by the pagan polemicists, see especially Hierocles. Hierocles dedicated a long, detailed work to proving the superiority of Apollonius to Christ. The work survives in fragments in Eusebius and Lactantius. See also Porphyry, *Against the Christians* (in Macarius Magnes *Apocrit.* 3).

<sup>99</sup> So Julian the Apostate, *Contra Gallienos* 200A, 235B-C.

<sup>100</sup> So Celsus, *Contra Celsum* 2.34, 3.22, 3.42, 8.41

<sup>101</sup> Almost all the opponents of Christianity were willing to concede this. It was an age when everyone believed in miracles. On this, see Frede (1997), p.235 and Grant (1952).

<sup>102</sup> Julian, *Contra Gallienos* 200A, compares Christ's miracles with those of Asklepius.

<sup>103</sup> This is exactly how Celsus deals with the miracles of Christ (*Contra Celsum* 1.6, 1.68, 1.71, 2.32 – passages cited by Chadwick (1953), p.102). On this, see Frede (1997), p.235. It is interesting to note that the Christians used exactly the same argument to attack the pagans. Eusebius, for example, laughs at the miracles of Apollonius as paltry, insignificant and inspired by evil demons (*Against the Followers of Apollonius* 4, 27; 31-35).

blazing fire; he returns to his companions and wreaks a terrible vengeance on his enemy.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, Apollonius is twice imprisoned and twice escapes punishment. The first time, he so terrifies the Emperor's minister that he is acquitted<sup>105</sup> and the second time he miraculously disappears from the court-room.<sup>106</sup> Celsus explicitly asks why Christ did not do the same as Apollonius (*Contra Celsum* 2.69). Since gods and heroes cannot be arrested, imprisoned or killed, the Passion was seized upon as obvious and indisputable evidence that Christ was not divine: the Gospels describe the wretched and cowardly life of a mere man.

Moreover, the Passion of Christ, as described in the four Gospels, was extremely hard to reconcile with the popular philosophical tradition of the 'noble death'.<sup>107</sup> When he wrote the *Phaedo*, Plato bequeathed to antiquity an immensely popular philosophical ideal: absolute indifference to pain and death. Stories of the most amazing fortitude during the most appalling tortures became an important topos of moral philosophy. Christian Apologists were keen to place Christ within this category of philosophical 'strong men'; his attitude to death is explicitly compared to that of Socrates.<sup>108</sup> For the pagans, however, Christ's behaviour in Gethsemane and before Pilate showed him to be the exact opposite of this popular heroic ideal.

I believe that it was in direct response to these pagan jibes that Origen developed his peculiar interpretation of Christ's life on earth. It was to answer the likes of Celsus that Origen deemed it necessary to concentrate almost exclusively on the Saviour's divine nature. Any reference to Christ's suffering humanity would be grist to the pagans' mill. This explains why, for instance, the very moment of Christ's death must become 'the supreme manifestation of royal authority' (*Commentary on St. John* 19.16 (4)).<sup>109</sup> We shall also see how Origen takes great pains to 'Stoicize' the Redeemer, to

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<sup>104</sup> The most famous version of the story of Dionysus is Euripides' *Bacchae*. Passages are quoted by Celsus (*Contra Celsum* 2.34) as a contrast to the life of Christ.

<sup>105</sup> *Life of Apollonius of Tyre* 7.4. Before the acquittal, he assures his companions that he will never be executed and magically breaks the chains binding his legs.

<sup>106</sup> *Life of Apollonius of Tyre* 8.8. Before his disappearance he tells Domitian: "You will not kill me, since I tell you I am not mortal." The final end of the sage is definitely not an ordinary human death. Philostratus tells us that his hero was extremely old (perhaps more than 100), but still beautiful, and (according to one story) that he simply disappeared from the earth (*ibid.* 8.29-30).

<sup>107</sup> Nock (1933), pp.194-196 discusses the topos of philosophical endurance, with illustrations from Plato, Horace and Epictetus. Sterling (2001) provides an interesting insight into the difficulties of reconciling the story of the Crucifixion with pagan philosophical ideals of the 'noble death'.

<sup>108</sup> See Frede (1997), p.120, (1999), pp.141-3 and Sterling (2001), p.384.

<sup>109</sup> This important phrase is discussed below, section 16.3.

compare him favourably with the greatest heroes of the pagan philosophical tradition: he is in fact far braver than Epictetus and Anaxarchus.<sup>110</sup>

#### 4.3.

The contemporary emphasis on the virtues of ἀπάθεια caused even more problems for Christians. Most philosophers saw the apathetic life as a moral ideal: the wise man strove to free himself entirely from all passion and emotion.<sup>111</sup> This was the constant state of God and must therefore be the aim of any man seeking the elusive ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ. The difficulty for the Christians was that the Christ of the Gospels, even God himself, did not seem to conform to this moral ideal. In the Old Testament, God is said to be angry (Jeremiah 15.14), regretful (1 Samuel 15.11), vengeful and jealous (Exodus 20.5) and to love and pity his chosen people (Psalm 49.6). In the New Testament, we read that 'God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to die for us' (1 John 4.9). Christ, the Son of God, is said to have been sorrowful (Matthew 26.38), troubled (John 13.21), grieved (John 11.33-5) and despairing (Matthew 27.46). The pagan apologists constantly ridiculed the Biblical depiction of God.<sup>112</sup> They had already rejected the absurd anthropomorphism of their traditional myths.<sup>113</sup> The allegorizing of religious mythology, particularly stories from Homer, began with the Stoics, but was quickly adopted by other philosophical schools. It was particularly popular in Alexandria. Plotinus' *Ennead* 3.5.2 is the perfect example of the re-interpretation of established religious texts: Aphrodite, Zeus and Kronos have become allegories of the Plotinian hypostases.<sup>114</sup> To the pagans it seemed laughable that Christians could still believe that God experienced emotions. Moreover, to those preaching the moral value of ἀπάθεια, it seemed all too obvious that Christ's life on earth was that of a mere man - clearly God could not experience such emotions - and a particularly pathetic man, who had not yet learnt to curb his passions and control his emotions.

In response to this criticism, philosophically minded Christians were forced into a radical re-interpretation of the Biblical descriptions of God and his Son. Clement of Alexandria, for example,

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<sup>110</sup> *Contra Celsum* 7.53, discussed in section 12.4.

<sup>111</sup> This way of life is usually associated with the Stoics, whose suppression of passion and emotion has become proverbial. But it was also an important ideal for the Platonists: the *Pheado* explicitly advocates the eradication of passion. The later Academic tradition developed the idea: Plotinus' *Ennead* 3.6 is an extended commentary on this very topic. For a discussion, see Dillon (1983) and Fleet (1995).

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, *Contra Celsum* 4.71; Julian the Apostate *Contra Gallienos* 155C-172A.

<sup>113</sup> See Fedou (1993), pp. 247-8.

<sup>114</sup> For a discussion of Plotinian allegory, see Hadot (1981). For a discussion of allegory in general, see Sandmel (1979), pp.17-28, Stead (1994), pp.143-4 and de Lang (1996), pp.248-50.

makes the bold claim that God, Christ and the Apostles were entirely without passion and emotion and that this should be the aim of every good Christian.<sup>115</sup> Origen too is full of praise for the virtues of ἀπάθεια. He cannot accept that God the Father genuinely experienced the emotions ascribed to him in the Bible. The Alexandrian is very ready to follow the pagans' lead and allegorize any references to God's anger, vengeance and jealousy.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, Origen clearly believes that the best kind of Christian is the one who lives an apathetic life. Passion and emotion are rooted in and are a response to the physical world, particularly the physical body. ἀπάθεια, by contrast, is a purely intellectual virtue, linked especially with right doctrine and a proper understanding of God.<sup>117</sup> At various points, Origen explicitly argues that the suppression of emotion is the safest way to avoid temptation and sin.<sup>118</sup> For some reason, critics have been slow to admit that Origen admired the apathetic life, but the evidence is

<sup>115</sup> See Casey (1925), pp.61-63 and 87-88, Mozley (1926), pp. 54-9, Spanneut (1969), pp. 248-50, 292-3 and Sorabji (2000), pp. 386 –391. The *locus classicus* for this view is *Stromateis* 6.9.

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, *de Principiis* 2.4.3-4 (including the famous claim *deus impassibilis est*); *de Principiis* 4.2.1; *Homilies on Jeremiah* 18.6; *Homilies on Judges* 2.4 and *Contra Celsum* 1.7 (last two cited in Crouzel (1956), p. 244). Mozley (1926), p.60 refers to *Contra Celsum* 4.71-2 in which Origen claims that it is impious to believe that God experienced human passions; he also cites *in Num. Hom.* 23.2, where Origen explicitly denies that God can be angry. Edwards (2002), p.57 refers to *Contra Celsum* 4.72 as an explicit denial of the possibility of divine wrath.

There is, however, one much discussed passage in which Origen admits that God the Father experiences the *passio charitatis* (*in Ezek. Hom.* 6.6). Origen feels obliged as a Christian to preach God's love for his creation and to cite this love as the major motive for the Incarnation. But we must be very careful how we interpret Origen's doctrine of the love of God. It is certainly not proof (Dewart (1976), p.284) that Origen's theology was basically 'Biblical' and not 'philosophical'. Stead (1994), p.130 writes of this passage that 'Origen's embarrassment is obvious' and Nemeshegyi (1960), pp.49-50 warns against placing too much emphasis on it. Fedou (1993), pp. 248-50 rightly points out that Origen's only concern is with love. Love is a special case, a unique kind of passion. To claim that God experiences the *passio charitatis* does not therefore contradict Origen's basic premiss that God is impassible. God's love is simply an expression of his essential being. Even Clement allowed God and the Gnostics to love one another (so, Casey (1925), pp.87-88, Mozley (1926), pp.58-9 and Lot-Borodine (1932), pp.529-30). Sorabji (2000), pp.388-89 tells us that even some Stoics allowed the wise man to love.

<sup>117</sup> This is an important argument in Origen's *Selecta in Psalmos* (PG 12, 1085AB; 1205D; 1424C; 1600C; 1628B; 1672C).

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, Origen's comments on David's description of himself as *the deaf man who hears not* (Psalm 38.14). Origen argues that ἀπάθεια is the deafness which keeps us from hearing the words of the tempter: κωφότης δὲ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀπάθεια, δι' ἣν οὐκ ἤκουεν αὐτῶν (*Selecta in Psalmos* PG 12, 1368C; cf. *ibid.* 1681C). Similarly, in the 9<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Genesis*, Origen argues that passions are the chains with which the devils bind us, until we crucify the body and its desires (PG 12, 214B). The reader is also directed to Origen's discussion of the 'sins of passion' at *de Principiis* 2.10.5: *amor, zelus, livor, ira, tristitia*. See also Origen's description of the ideal Christian at *Commentary on St Matthew* 15.17: ἀνδρείος καὶ δίκαιος καὶ σώφρων καὶ ἐκτὸς παντὸς πάθους . . . λέγω δὲ τὴν ἐπαιν εἶναι ἀπάθειαν καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ἀρετὴν. In the same *Commentary* Origen cites ἀπάθεια as one of the 'spiritual foods' (Frag. 65).

undeniable.<sup>119</sup> Since Origen clearly believed that ἀπάθεια was the goal to which all good Christians strive, he must also believe that Christ, the moral exemplum *par excellence*, was entirely free of passion and emotion. When we look at Origen's discussions of Christ's Last Hours, we shall see that this is certainly the case. Origen's exegesis of the Agony in the Garden and of the Arraignment before Pilate are deliberate and obvious attempts to cast Christ in the guise of a Stoic sage, proverbially calm in the face of death.

#### 4.4.

We conclude therefore that Origen was constantly aware of the criticisms of his pagan opponents. The desire to convince and to convert philosophically minded contemporaries inspires his whole theological enterprise. Apology may not always be explicit, or even conscious, but it remains the driving force behind almost all Origen's doctrines. In the following section of this chapter, we shall see how Origen developed a soteriology that could directly appeal to the pagan intellectual. Origen makes very few references to the significance of the Crucifixion, and there are good apologetic reasons for this. Most philosophers would have been repulsed by the centrality of suffering and death in the Christian religion. Hence the soteriological significance of Origen's Christ is primarily didactic. He is the leader of a moral reformation, whose mission is to guide souls back to the Father. This is a rôle which the pagans could readily accept.

### ORIGEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE FALL AND OF REDEMPTION.

#### 5.1.

In a recent study, Joseph Trigg has suggested that Origen does not have a fully developed understanding of the Redemption, of the exact ways and means by which Christ redeemed the world.<sup>120</sup>

What is particularly important for us is the fact that he almost completely ignores the rôle of the Saviour's humanity in the soteriological process. Origen has little comprehension of the reasons why

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<sup>119</sup> The *Sources Chrétiennes* editors of *de Principiis* Vol. 4, pp.60-61 try to argue that Origen veered more towards an Aristotelian μετριοπάθεια than a full-blown ἀπάθεια. They write: "L'extrême rareté du vocabulaire de l'apathie dans son oeuvre – les emplois origéniens se comptent sur les doigts d'une main – contraste avec l'usage continu qu'en fait son maître Clement." It is patently incorrect to claim that Origen used the term rarely: the *TLG* gives forty-six references. Sorabji (2000), p.387 accepts that Origen presented ἀπάθεια as a moral ideal, but for some reason he has missed the most obvious and interesting discussions from the *Selecta in Psalmos*. Roldanus (1968), p.337 rightly sees that 'le combat contre le péché est lié, aux yeux d'Origène, le combat contre les pâthes – ce sont principalement les désirs charnels.' Lot-Borodine (1932), pp.531-2 also recognizes that ἀπάθεια was a moral ideal for Origen.

<sup>120</sup> Trigg (1983), p.100. Trigg restricts his comments to the *de Principiis*. I would go further and claim that Origen never provides a satisfactory explanation of the Redemption.

the Redeemer need be a suffering Redeemer or why Christ's death on the Cross was the central moment in the history of Salvation. Although Origen cannot deny the Biblical fact of the Passion, it is for him a rather embarrassing episode and one that could have no place in his own philosophical system.<sup>121</sup> We shall also see how Origen rejects the popular Apologist doctrine, according to which the success of salvation depends upon the identity of the Saviour's humanity with the humanity of those who are to be saved.<sup>122</sup> For Origen, by contrast, it is the Saviour's divinity that is the *locus* and centre of his salvific success. The nature of his humanity is irrelevant.

In the following section of this chapter, we shall consider Origen's doctrine(s) of the Redemption as developed in his major works. It will quickly become apparent that, for Origen, the humanity of the Saviour has no direct salvific input: it is simply the medium through which the message is delivered. We shall also see how Origen's understanding of the fall, in particular his refusal to recognize any weakness or handicaps characteristic of a fallen race, leaves very little room for any kind of Redeemer. Origen's man saves himself; Christ simply points the way.

## 5.2.

In the *de Principiis*, Origen rarely mentions Christ's death and never considers its soteriological significance. The rare references to the Crucifixion are simply a nod to established orthodoxy, what Origen calls the 'Apostolic doctrine.'<sup>123</sup> In the preface to the *de Principiis*, Origen provides his readers with a brief overview of orthodox theology. This simple creed naturally includes the article that Christ was crucified (*de Principiis*, preface 4). In the Summary of the work's most important doctrines, the Crucifixion is again mentioned, but only in passing (*de Principiis*, 4.4.4). What is noticeably lacking from the *de Principiis* is any discussion of the purposes of Christ's suffering and death. What did it achieve or solve? What was the benefit for fallen man? Indeed, in this exhaustive analysis of the fundamentals (*principia*) of the Christian faith, the very fact of the Incarnation is sidelined and marginalized. Kelly points out that "the Incarnation as such really stands outside the logic of Origen's system."<sup>124</sup> Hal Koch and Marguerite Harl express disappointment that the chapter devoted to the Incarnation (*de Principiis* 2.6) provides no analysis of the aims, purposes and achievements of God

<sup>121</sup> See sections 4.2-4.3 for an explanation of this 'embarrassment'.

<sup>122</sup> Epitomized in Irenaeus' famous claim that 'the unassumed is the unhealed'.

<sup>123</sup> For a discussion of this, see Bennett (1997), pp.195-6; Le Boulluec (1985) II, p.441 and Outler (1939), pp.212-221. See also the Introduction to Chapter 1.

<sup>124</sup> Kelly (1977), p.137. Even Daniélou (1948), 259 admits that "La théorie de l'Incarnation tient peu de place dans l'oeuvre d'Origène", but c.f. sections 5.7 and 6.1 for an overview of Daniélou's usual position.

becoming man.<sup>125</sup> The chapter is simply a description of the process of the Incarnation – how it was possible for God to assume a human body – and of the end result – the relationship between the Saviour’s humanity and his divinity.

Furthermore, the very notion of Redemption fits very ill with the overall scheme of the *de Principiis*. The pivotal thesis of this work is the power and influence of the will for the salvation of souls. Even the devil could be saved, if only he *wanted* to be.<sup>126</sup> Although God certainly provides a complex system of providential intervention to educate the soul and to encourage it to return to heaven,<sup>127</sup> the fact remains that it is the individual himself who is the author of his own salvation. We are saved simply by *wanting* to be saved. This obviously removes the necessity for a Redeemer.<sup>128</sup> In the *de Principiis*, Origen minimizes the significance and the consequences of the fall. And of course, by minimizing the significance and the consequences of the fall, Origen undermines the fundamental Christian belief in the need for a Redeemer.<sup>129</sup> For Origen, man could have managed very well by himself, since he suffers none of the handicaps traditionally associated with the fallen race.

For Origen, the fall can mean one of two things: either the fall of souls from pre-carnate bliss or the fall of the historical Adam. Perhaps the two need not be mutually exclusive, but exactly how Origen connected them is a very difficult question to answer.<sup>130</sup> In the *de Principiis*, Origen’s only concern is with the fall of souls.<sup>131</sup> The fall of souls from heaven and their descent into the body and the material universe as the result of pre-carnate sin is the central theme of the *de Principiis*. Mankind is therefore a fallen race which exists only as the result of sin. But having said this, it is very hard to pin point the

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<sup>125</sup> Koch (1932), p.63 and Harl (1957), p.106.

<sup>126</sup> For a further discussion of this, the corner-stone of Origen’s philosophical system, see section 8.2.

<sup>127</sup> On the subject of God’s pedagogic providence, see especially Koch (1932).

<sup>128</sup> de Faye (1931) III, p.213-15 has recognized the fundamental importance of the will in Origen’s explanation of salvation: “Dans la doctrine de notre théologien, le libre arbitre est un élément essentiel. L’entité rationnelle qui de chute en chute est devenue un être humain, a failli parce qu’elle *l’a voulu*. Elle ne se relevera pas sans qu’elle *le veuille*. Elle *choisira* le bien, et c’est alors que commencera son retour à Dieu . . . ainsi, dans (la) relèvement comme dans (la) chute, (la) *liberté* joue le rôle principal” (my emphasis). Hal Koch (1932), pp.75-6 similarly argues that the central importance of free will and pedagogic providence in Origen’s philosophy removes any need for Redemption: “Wenn es richtig ist, dass die zwei Brennpunkte in der Theologie des Origenes der Gedanke an eine erzieherische Vorsehung und den freien Willen des Menschen sind, möchte man zu der Anschauung neigen, dass ihm Erlösungs- und Versöhnungstheologie recht fern lägen.”

<sup>129</sup> So, Holloway (2000b).

<sup>130</sup> Bammell (1989), pp.68-9 attempts an explanation. She suggests that Origen believed that there were two falls, the fall of souls, followed by the fall of man. Pisi and Harl (cited in *ibid*, footnote 34) argue that the two are not connected and that they cannot easily be reconciled. But, as Bammell reminds us, Origen is not a dogmatic theologian. He is very capable of airing two entirely different interpretations of the fall. For more on this, see section 6.1.

<sup>131</sup> Williams (1927), pp.215-6 refers to *de Principiis* 4.3.1, where Origen ridicules the literal interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve: who is so stupid as to believe it?

precise consequences of this fall, other than the abandoning of heaven for the earth. It is certainly wrong to cite the pre-carnate fall as the cause of a universal sinful tendency.<sup>132</sup> It is of course true that all men must have sinned at least once in order for them to exist as men, but there seems to be no suggestion that this first sin somehow made further sinning more likely. It is abundantly clear that even fallen souls retain the liberty of indifference.<sup>133</sup> That is to say, there is no bias towards sin as a result of the fall. Neither is there any hint that fallen souls have lost their knowledge of good and evil and their ability to distinguish successfully between the two. For most theologians of the Early Church, moral ignorance was the major characteristic of fallen man.<sup>134</sup> Origen, by contrast, emphasizes again and again that all men, as soon as they reach the age of reason, have the ability to distinguish good and evil, to choose the former and thereby be saved.<sup>135</sup>

At *de Principiis* 3.5.6, Origen does provide a brief discussion of the purposes of Christ's life on earth. It is important that this is not an explanation of the purposes of the *Incarnation*, of God's assuming a human body, but simply of God's direct communication with man. The task of the Saviour described here is basically the same as that of the 'ministers, rulers and helpers', those angels who are the agents and instruments of God's providential government. Origen believes that Christ's salvific mission was primarily didactic and exhortative. Christ came to teach and to encourage, but it is up to the individual whether or not he heed this teaching. Although Origen does admit that there was only one, the Creator himself, who was able to restore order and to save the world from imminent destruction, the fact remains that Christ's life was simply an intense version of an on-going soteriological process. Throughout history, God has sent his angels to deliver the message of salvation; now he sends his Son.<sup>136</sup>

Various scholars claim that Origen explained the soteriological significance of the Incarnation by arguing that the hypostatic union was the prototype and the guarantor of our own union with God. This idea was very popular with the Apologists. Irenaeus is famous for claiming that God became man that man might become God and that the unassumed is the unhealed.<sup>137</sup> This explains the Apologists'

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<sup>132</sup> Williams (1927), p.217 agrees that in the *de Principiis* there is "no idea of an inherited bias towards evil."

<sup>133</sup> For references and a full discussion, see section 8.2.

<sup>134</sup> See de Bruyn (1993), pp. 23 and 41.

<sup>135</sup> See *de Principiis* 3.1.2; *Contra Celsum* 1.4, 8.52. This idea is central to the *Commentary on Romans* (PG 14 892A-894C and 1014A- 1016B). For a full discussion of this crucially important topic, see section 5.6.

<sup>136</sup> For more on this, see section 5.7.

<sup>137</sup> For a discussion of this, see Lot-Borodine (1932), pp. 31-2.



insistence that Christ's humanity be exactly the same as ours. According to Wiles, this precedence of soteriology explained and characterized all early Christology: what happened to Christ will happen to us. The identity of Christ's nature to ours was thus the crucial and necessary condition for our redemption.<sup>138</sup>

Fournier, in a detailed discussion of Origen's doctrine of the Redemption, claims that "l'Incarnation est le moment suprême de la Rédemption, parce que l'humanité du Verbe rend seule possible la réunion de Dieu et de l'homme."<sup>139</sup> This passage is quoted by Nemeshegyi in support of his own thesis that the union of Christ's humanity with the Logos is the precursor of our own deification. Specifically, he cites the Logos' absorption of the soul of Christ<sup>140</sup> as the first stage of Redemption.<sup>141</sup> Refoulé agrees that the importance of Origen's doctrine of the soul of Christ is basically soteriological: "son union mystique au Verbe se presente nécessairement alors comme le prototype de la nôtre."<sup>142</sup> Marguerite Harl claims that the Incarnation realized *for the first time* the union of a man with God, a union that would later be imitated by every Christian soul.<sup>143</sup>

For all these scholars, the Incarnation – the union of humanity with divinity – was an extraordinary and supernatural event. Its salvific importance is thus explained as the raising of man, exemplified in the man Jesus, above and beyond his natural state and thus enabling an otherwise impossible union with God. But while this might be a useful way of understanding the Christology of the Apologists and of later orthodox theologians, it is not the way that Origen understands the Incarnation. Throughout the *de Principiis*, (especially at *de Principiis* 1.6.2), Origen argues that salvation is simply a return to the beginning. Souls participated in the Logos before the fall and will do so again. There is no suggestion that salvation involves a fundamental change in the nature of created souls or that it is beyond their normal capacities. On the contrary, participation in the Logos is our natural state, the life intended by God when he first created souls (*de Principiis* 2.6.3). Divine intervention, to achieve the hitherto impossible, is unnecessary. As we have already argued, the *de Principiis* provides a coherent scheme

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<sup>138</sup> Wiles (1969). Lot-Borodine (1932), p.31-4 agrees that Irenaeus' explanation of the Incarnation became the 'nerve même de la pensée patristique.' He quotes extensively from the Fathers to prove his point. See section 9.4 for a discussion of Origen's utter rejection of this central Patristic thesis.

<sup>139</sup> Fournier, *Exposition critique des idées d'Origène sur la Rédemption* (Strasbourg, 1890), p.10. Quoted in Nemeshegyi (1960), p.156.

<sup>140</sup> Described at *de Principiis* 2.6. This crucial aspect of Origen's Christology is discussed in sections 8.1-9.6.

<sup>141</sup> Nemeshegyi (1960), p. 164.

<sup>142</sup> Refoulé (1961), p.264.

<sup>143</sup> Harl (1957), pp.204 and 259. See section 9.3 for a further discussion of this point, including quotations from other scholars.

by which man saves himself. It is not the place to discuss in detail Origen's doctrine of the soul of Christ as developed at *de Principiis* 2.6.<sup>144</sup> Suffice it to say that its significance is not soteriological in the sense of providing a salvific paradigm. The union of the soul of Christ with the Logos, or rather the transformation of the former into the latter, is not intended to be an imitable pattern of behaviour, nor is it the necessary precursor of our own deification. It is not the case, as Refoulé and the others argue, that the final status of the soul of Christ is the status planned for the elect.<sup>145</sup>

### 5.3.

In the first few books of the *Commentary on St John*, written at the same time as the *de Principiis*,<sup>146</sup> we find a similar view of the Incarnation. The redemptive rôle of Christ described here is basically pedagogic. Christ came to earth, not to suffer and to die, but to teach. And, as Bicknell points out, if Christ's salvific function is reduced to this, a docetic epiphany would do just as well as an Incarnation.<sup>147</sup> The assumption of a human body was just a way of communicating. To those unable to understand God as God, he appeared as man. God became man in providential condescension to our crippling weakness. In deference to this, God veiled himself with a human body, revealing only a 'stone of the mountain' or a 'drop of myrrh'.<sup>148</sup> It is in the first few books of the *Commentary on St John* that Origen develops most fully the theory that the Incarnation hides and veils God rather than reveals him. What Origen will not accept is that the Incarnation had any intrinsic importance or value (it was simply the means to an end) or that the man Jesus revealed the true nature of God. The assuming of human flesh was but a necessary and temporary disguise, a didactic tool.

The figure of the Incarnated Redeemer is just the first stage, the lowest rung on the ladder to the true understanding of God, a sop and a comfort to children and beginners. The aim is that, in due course, we should see beyond the veil of flesh and understand the divinity which it concealed. As they grow and learn, the catechumens will no longer need to imagine God as man: they will be able to understand God as God.<sup>149</sup> At *Commentary on St. John* 2.2-3, Origen epitomizes this important argument. He

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<sup>144</sup> We do so in sections 8.1-9.6.

<sup>145</sup> There are two points here. (1) That union with the Logos is within the grasp of any rational soul; indeed it is its natural state and (2) that the kind of union enjoyed by the soul of Christ is entirely different from the kind of union enjoyed by ordinary souls. These points are discussed in detail in sections 9.3-9.4.

<sup>146</sup> For the chronology of Origen's writings, see Harl (1957), pp. 379-386.

<sup>147</sup> Bicknell (1950), p.58.

<sup>148</sup> For these images, see section 1.3.

<sup>149</sup> On this important topic, see Louth (1981), p. 65: "So the soul, it seems, passes beyond faith in the Incarnation in its ascent to God. The Incarnation is only a stage. It would seem that Origen's Platonist presuppositions here are proof against the impact of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation: the

categorizes believers according to intellectual capacity, according to their different ways of understanding God.<sup>150</sup> At a very low level are those who look no further than the physical and the material, those who cling to Christ Incarnate.<sup>151</sup>

The doctrine of the Incarnation as providential accommodation is best understood within the context of Origen's theory of the ἐπίνοιαί of Christ, one of the most important and most discussed aspects of his Christology. In the first two books of the *Commentary on St John*, Origen analyses the various Christological titles and shows how the one Logos appears under a variety of different aspects (ἐπίνοιαί). The Logos accommodates himself to the different needs of different individuals. To some, he appears as the Good Shepherd, to others Truth, Wisdom or Light. Origen distinguishes those ἐπίνοιαί that belong to Christ's eternal and divine nature and those which are aspects of his humanity. While it might be helpful for children and beginners to consider Christ according to his lower aspects (those aspects which describe his Incarnated nature), the mature Christian concentrates on his eternal and divine aspects (God in himself, not merely in relation to man). The divine ἐπίνοιαί represent the true and eternal nature of the Logos, while the ἐπίνοιαί which describe Christ's human nature are temporary guises assumed for the sake of man. Harl rightly draws attention to the distinction between εἶναι and γίγνεσθαι: the Logos is always Truth, Wisdom and Life, but merely *becomes* the Good Shepherd, the Vine, etc.<sup>152</sup> The former describe the nature of the Logos in and for itself; the latter describe his relations to us (ἡμῖν / πρὸς ἡμᾶς).<sup>153</sup>

In the *Commentary on St John*, the Incarnation is seen as the supreme example of the condescension and accommodation of the Logos. It is itself an ἐπίνοια, a way of revealing and a way of seeing. At one particular time and in one particular place, the Logos chose to appear as the man Jesus. But the

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Incarnation is not really central, but simply a preliminary stage." See also Greer (1972), p.53 and von Harnack (1896) II, p.369, who writes that "the whole humanity of the Redeemer together with its history finally disappears from the eyes of the perfect one. What remains is the principal, the divine reason, which became known through Christ."

<sup>150</sup> Origen is at heart an elitist. Only the few can really understand God in himself. The majority (τὸ πλῆθος) are attached to the man, Jesus. Lebreton (1923), argues that Origen has developed a two tier Christianity, the faith of the *simpliciores* and the knowledge or wisdom of the perfect.

<sup>151</sup> "ἑτεροὶ δὲ οἱ μηδὲν εἰδότες "εἰ μὴ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον", τὸν γενόμενον σάρκα λόγον τὸ πᾶν νομίσαντες εἶναι τοῦ λόγου, Χριστὸν κατὰ σάρκα μόνον γινώσκουσι· τοιοῦτον δὲ ἐστὶ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν πεπιστευκέναι νομιζομένων (*Commentary on St John* 2.3).

<sup>152</sup> Harl (1951), p.122.

<sup>153</sup> Harl (1957), pp. 118 and 130. I disagree, however, with her claim that the distinction between γίγνεσθαι and εἶναι 'ne doit pas être compris chronologiquement'. It is obviously the case that the Logos 'becomes' the Good Shepherd etc. only at the Incarnation. Origen explicitly tells us that if there had been no sheep to guide, the Logos would not have been the Good Shepherd. There is a definite

Incarnation does not represent nor reveal the true and eternal nature of the God. We are explicitly told that the assuming of flesh hid Christ's divinity to such an extent that it appeared as a mere shadow.

Origen contrasts the Logos as he is in heaven – *faithful and true* – with his incarnated state: κύριος γὰρ κατὰ τὸν Μωσέα πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός· καὶ ἀληθινὸς γὰρ πρὸς ἀντιδιαστολὴν σκιᾶς καὶ τύπου καὶ εἰκόνης, ἐπεὶ τοιοῦτος ὁ ἐν τῷ ἀνεωρότι οὐρανῷ λόγος· ὁ γὰρ ἐπὶ γῆς οὐ τοιοῦτος ὁποῖος ὁ ἐν οὐρανῷ, ἅτε γενόμενος σὰρξ καὶ διὰ σκιᾶς καὶ τύπων καὶ εἰκόνων λαλούμενος (*Commentary on St John* 2.6 (4)).<sup>154</sup>

Origen goes on to say that the majority of believers are disciples of this 'shadow': only the select few are capable of understanding God as he really is.

That the assumption of a human body is only a temporary disguise, the necessary response to the needs of the moment, is reflected in Origen's belief that the exalted Christ is divested of all corporeality. He becomes what he once was, pure spirit, one with the Logos.<sup>155</sup> Having completed his earthly mission, having delivered the salvific message, there is no further need for a human body. The Logos puts off his flesh and returns to his pristine state: τοῦ λόγου ἐπανελθόντος ἀπὸ τοῦ σεσαρκῶσθαι ἐφ' ὃ ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν (*Commentary on St John* 1.7 (9)).<sup>156</sup> The man Jesus ceases to be a man and becomes the Logos. This is in fact Origen's definition of the Exaltation, the exalting of Christ's humanity to become God: ἡ δὲ ὑπερύψωσις τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, γενομένη αὐτῷ δοξάσαντι τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ θανάτῳ, αὕτη ἦν, τὸ μηκέτι ἕτερον αὐτὸν εἶναι τοῦ λόγου ἀλλὰ τὸν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ (*Commentary on St John* 32.25 (17)). As Harl puts it, "(Origène) isole en quelque sorte l'Incarnation comme un moment de la vie du Verbe."<sup>157</sup> This belief became one of the major issues of the Origenist controversy. It seemed to strike right at the heart of traditional Biblical Christology and to undermine the hope of the faithful in Christ's constant intercession. There seems to be no recognition in Origen of the need for the continued existence of the humanity of Christ if he is to be the affective mediator between God and man.<sup>158</sup> Yet, beginning with Pamphilus and continuing even today, Origen's

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chronological development. On this point, see Heine (1993), p.97: "the latter (γίγνεσθαι) implies a time of not being followed by being; the former (εἶναι) applies to a continuous state of being."

<sup>154</sup> Passage cited in Harl (1957), p. 197.

<sup>155</sup> Harnack (1896), p. 371.

<sup>156</sup> Passage discussed by Harl (1957), p.198.

<sup>157</sup> Harl (1957), p.198.

<sup>158</sup> St Paul insists that our mediator with the Father is the *man* Jesus Christ (I Timothy 2.5). On this point, see Forrest (2000), pp. 133-4.

apologists have tried to defend him and to assert his orthodoxy on this point.<sup>159</sup> But it seems to me indisputable that Origen believed the exalted Christ to be entirely incorporeal. First, there is ample evidence, not only from the *Commentary on St John*.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, if the assuming of flesh is merely a pedagogic tool, there would be no need for its continued existence.<sup>161</sup>

#### 5.4.

We find similar arguments in the *Contra Celsum*, where Origen claims that the purpose and aim of the Incarnation was to reveal theological truths and to offer moral guidance. As Harl points out, the Christ of the *Contra Celsum* is presented as the leader of a philosophical sect.<sup>162</sup> This point is most clearly made at *Contra Celsum* 4.3. When Celsus explicitly asks what was the point of the Incarnation, Origen replies that it was to correct and convert. Similarly, when Celsus asks how Christ saved men, Origen replies that it was by teaching them (*Contra Celsum* 6.68). At *Contra Celsum* 1.56, Origen asserts that the purpose of the Incarnation was to teach the way that leads to God (ἀνθρώποις ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς διδάξῃ τὴν φέρουσαν πρὸς θεὸν ὁδόν). Similarly, at *Contra Celsum* 3.34, Origen claims that he ‘admires’ Jesus as the one who changed our way of thinking and taught us how to worship God. The *Contra Celsum* contains very little discussion of the soteriological significance of Christ’s humanity, specifically of his suffering and death. As we shall see when we look at Origen’s descriptions of the Agony and the Crucifixion, his main aim is to present Christ in the guise of the Stoic sage, proverbially calm in the face of death.<sup>163</sup> Origen’s apologetic method in the *Contra Celsum* seems to be a constant, rather petty one-upmanship: Christ was braver than Epictetus, had a better theology than Plato and converted more people than Asklepius. Origen is less interested in the innovations of the new religion than in its similarities to existing models.<sup>164</sup> Christianity was not very different from its predecessors, but nevertheless vastly superior.

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<sup>159</sup> Pamphilus (*Apology* 7, PG 17, 601B) argues that Origen simply meant that Christ had ceased to be mortal, subject to death and decay. This interpretation is followed by the *Sources Chrétiennes* and *Patrologia Graeca* editors of the *Homilies on St Luke* (ad. loc. in *Luc.Hom.* 29).

<sup>160</sup> See especially *Homilies on Jeremiah* 17.5. Commenting on the verse – *cursed be the man that trusteth in man* (Jeremiah 15.6) – Origen reassures his congregation that Christ is no longer a man. He quotes II Corinthians 5.16 as Scriptural proof for this claim: *yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth we know him no more*. See also *Homilies on St Luke* 29, where Origen tells us that *tunc homo fuit, nunc autem homo cessavit*.

<sup>161</sup> We also point out that, since Origen is so wary of allowing even ordinary humans a corporeal Resurrection, he is unlikely to preach the bodily Resurrection of Christ in any literal sense.

<sup>162</sup> Harl (1957), p.307.

<sup>163</sup> Sections 12.1-12.5; 16.1-16.3.

<sup>164</sup> See chapter 1, section 1.2 on the apologetic advantages of this.

Origen's failure in the *Contra Celsum* to explain the soteriological significance of the Passion could perhaps be explained and excused by the apologetic nature of the work. Pagan philosophers such as Celsus would not be interested in the *minutiae* of the doctrine of the Redemption and would have been repulsed by the centrality of suffering and death within that process. They would have been much more likely to admire an intelligent theologian, a moral reformer, a brave hero submitting with equanimity to the will of God and to the barbarism of his tormentors. The Christ of the *Contra Celsum* fits perfectly the genre of the work, namely philosophical apologetic.<sup>165</sup> But, as we have seen above, the views expressed in the *Contra Celsum* are repeated in works written for an exclusively Christian audience. It is not simply in deference to a pagan readership that Origen marginalizes the Incarnation and the Crucifixion.

In the *Contra Celsum* Origen repeats the idea that the figure of the Incarnated Redeemer is just a necessary first stage, which the mature Christian no longer needs. At *Contra Celsum* 6.68, we again read that the Incarnation was the supreme example of the condescension of the Logos. To those unable to understand God as God, he appeared as a man and spoke as a man: ἐγένετο σὰρξ, ἵνα χωρηθῇ ὑπὸ τῶν μὴ δυναμένων αὐτὸν βλέπειν καθὼς λόγος ἦν καὶ πρὸς θεὸν ἦν καὶ θεὸς ἦν. But, as in the *Commentary on St John*, Origen insists that the aim and purpose of Christ's life on earth was to lead men to the contemplation of the eternal Logos, the Son of God as he was before the assumption of human flesh: μετὰ τοῦτο αὐτοὺς ἀναβιβάσῃ ἐπὶ τὸ ἰδεῖν αὐτόν, ὅπερ ἦν πρὶν γένηται σὰρξ (*Contra Celsum* 6.68).<sup>166</sup> The assuming of a body was simply the means of communicating with the fallen race. The majority of Christ's contemporaries were unable to bear the full revelation of his divinity. It was to accommodate them that he appeared as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Only Peter, James and John were capable of witnessing the Transfiguration – the revelation of Christ's true divinity.<sup>167</sup> Alone of the disciples, these three were worthy of seeing God as God. As Harl points out in *Origène et La Fonction Révélatrice du Verbe Incarné*, it is when he ceases to be a man, ceases to have a body, that Christ truly

<sup>165</sup> On the general question of the intended readership of Apologetic literature, see chapter 1, section 1.2. For a discussion of the intended readership of the *Contra Celsum*, see Frede (1999), pp.152-4.

<sup>166</sup> See *Contra Celsum* 4.15 for exactly the same arguments. The assumption of flesh was simply the 'first stage'; at the final stage, we shall be 'lifted up' to contemplate the Logos in its pristine state.

<sup>167</sup> *Contra Celsum* 2.64 and 4.16. There is an important moral dimension to this argument. It is not simply that most people are *intellectually* incapable of knowing God. They are *morally* incapable: their sins blind them and prevent them from seeing the Saviour's full glory and full beauty. This is an aspect of the fundamental Origenist doctrine of the correlation between knowledge and virtue: only the spiritually pure can know spiritual truths. On this, see Crouzel (1989), p.189.

reveals God.<sup>168</sup> His flesh is a veil hiding his true nature, preserving the mystery of God for the select few, for those who are intellectually and morally capable of the supreme revelation.

Origen believes that Christ reveals himself gradually and progressively in response to the spiritual and intellectual development of the individual believer. So at *Contra Celsum* 4.16, we read that the Logos assumes different forms in direct correlation to our differing capabilities: καθὼς ἐκάστῳ τῶν εἰς ἐπιστήμην ἀγομένων φαίνεται ὁ λόγος, ἀνάλογον τῇ ἔξει τοῦ εἰσαγομένου ἢ ἐπ' ὀλίγον προκόποντος ἢ ἐπὶ πλείον ἢ καὶ ἐγγὺς ἤδη γινομένου τῆς ἀρετῆς ἢ καὶ ἐν ἀρετῇ γεγεννημένου. Harl suggests that this is an idea taken from pagan philosophy: Platonism especially stressed the need for an active, personal quest for God, a step by step discovery.<sup>169</sup> The important point is that redemption (knowledge of God) is a personal, individual achievement. Everyone works in his own way and at his own pace. Origen does not like the idea of fallen man redeemed *en masse* by the Incarnation.<sup>170</sup> God becoming man is only the beginning of the story. Salvation requires each individual to discover for himself the reality behind the disguise, the divinity behind the humanity. Some, Peter, James and John, are quick to do so. Others, the majority of believers, are still far off. This idea is very clearly stated at *Contra Celsum* 2.64, as part of an exegesis of the Transfiguration. This passage epitomizes Origen's theory of the Redemption, the way in which God accommodates himself to the wants, needs and capacities of individual men. This is the doctrine of the ἐπίνοιαι, which we have already met in the *Commentary on St John*:

‘Ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἷς ὢν πλείονα τῇ ἐπινόῳ ἦν, καὶ τοῖς βλέπουσιν οὐχ ὁμοίως πᾶσιν ὁρώμενος. καὶ ὅτι μὲν τῇ ἐπινόῳ πλείονα ἦν, καὶ σαφές ἐκ τοῦ ‘ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ καὶ τοῦ ‘ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος καὶ τοῦ ‘ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ θύρα καὶ ἄλλων μυρίων. ὅτι δὲ καὶ βλέπόμενος οὐχ ὡσαύτως τοῖς βλέπουσιν ἐφαίνετο, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐχώρουν οἱ βλέποντες, σαφές ἔσται τοῖς ἐφιστάσι, διὰ τί μέλλων μεταμορφοῦσθαι ἐν τῷ ὑψηλῷ ὄρει οὐδὲ τοὺς ἀποστόλους πάντας παρείληφεν ἀλλάμουνους τὸν Πέτρον καὶ τὸν Ἰάκωβον καὶ τὸν Ἰωάννην, ὡς μόνους χωροῦντας τὴν τότε δόξαν αὐτοῦ θεωρῆσαι (*Contra Celsum* 2.64).<sup>171</sup>

<sup>168</sup> Harl (1957), p.204.

<sup>169</sup> Harl (1957), p.341. Lyman (1993), pp.45 and 81 likewise stresses Origen's emphasis upon individual, personal discoveries.

<sup>170</sup> On this, see Harl (1957), p. 131. Neither does he like the idea of a ‘fallen race’. For Origen, each individual falls in his own particular way and is therefore redeemed in his own particular way. See sections 5.5-5.6 for a discussion of Origen's doctrine of the fall.

<sup>171</sup> See also *Contra Celsum* 2.65 and 2.67. McGuckin (1985) writes very well on this subject of Christ accommodating himself to our varying needs. He stresses the soteriological inspiration behind Origen's theory of the ‘changing forms’ of Christ. It is not, as it was for the Gnostics, simply an expression of docetism.

## 5.5.

As is perhaps to be expected, there is no discussion of the fall of Adam in the *Contra Celsum*: Origen's pagan readers would not be expected to bother themselves with the complexities of a peculiarly Christian doctrine. Williams draws attention to *Contra Celsum* 4.40, where Origen explicitly rejects the literal interpretation of Genesis 3.<sup>172</sup> Adam and Eve are not historical individuals, but metaphorical or mythological *exempla* of the universal human condition. Even the fall of souls, an ubiquitous philosophical common-place, is referred to only obliquely (*Contra Celsum* 5.29, 5.55 and 7.50), without discussion of any handicaps that might accompany this fall.<sup>173</sup> In the enormous *Commentary on St John* there is only scant reference to this fundamental Christian doctrine. The reason for this is surely to be found in the work's polemical bias. Origen wrote the *Commentary on St John* primarily as a refutation of (his interpretation of) Gnostic determinism.<sup>174</sup> In this context, it would obviously be wise to emphasize the freedom of the will, specifically the liberty of indifference, and to ignore the possibility of a lapsarian bias towards evil.<sup>175</sup> We have already seen how references to the fall are noticeably lacking in the *de Principiis*.<sup>176</sup>

Indeed, it is hard to find any mention in Origen of the permanent consequences of the fall of man. Although Adam certainly fell and was certainly expelled from Paradise, the implications for posterity are left very unclear. In the *Homilies on St Luke* and the *Homilies on Leviticus* Origen stresses the importance of infant baptism, but this is not proof of his belief in original sin.<sup>177</sup> The discussions are rather a mélange of Platonic wariness of the corporeal and Jewish fears of the ritually unclean.<sup>178</sup> In his lengthy exegesis of the Presentation at the Temple (Luke 2. 23-4), Origen tells us that even Christ was in need of purification. We can safely conclude therefore that Origen did not associate the congenital

<sup>172</sup> Williams (1927), p.229.

<sup>173</sup> It should perhaps be noted that in the pagan version of the fall of souls (e.g. Plato, *Phaedrus* 253Cff), there is no question of souls being permanently damaged by the primaeval fall.

<sup>174</sup> Origen's main opponent in the *Commentary on St John* is the Valentinian, Heracleon, whose own *Commentary* is extensively quoted. There is some discussion as to whether Origen has really understood the complexities of Gnostic determinism (Dihle (1984), pp. 150-57).

<sup>175</sup> See, for example, *Commentary on St John* 32.18 (11). We discuss this and similar passages in detail in section 8.2. Williams (1927), p.218 agrees that Origen's insistence on the autonomy of the will is 'irreconcilable' with the notion of an '*a-priori* inclination to wickedness.'

<sup>176</sup> See section 5.2.

<sup>177</sup> As Bigg (1886), pp. 202-3 claims. Passage cited (and rejected) by Bammell (1989), p. 92 n. 96.

<sup>178</sup> So Crouzel, Fournier and Périchon (1962), p.219. Williams (1927), p.224 suggests that Origen "seems for a long time to have experimented with the idea of ritual impurity, or 'bad manna', assumed by the Levitical law to infect the physiological process of conception and to need 'expiation'." Williams cites *Homilies on Leviticus* 8.3 in support of this.



*sordes* with sin: *neque enim idipsum significant sordes atque peccata* (in *Luc. Hom.* 14.3).<sup>179</sup> Indeed Origen explicitly states that babies could not have committed sins. Infant baptism was not to be understood as a purification for sins that had actually happened and was not therefore a genuine recognition of the effects of the fall. Origen's argument here is in stark contrast to Augustine's famous description of selfish and greedy babies squabbling over their nurse's milk (*Confessions* 1.7). For Origen the baptism of children was emphatically not the admission of a universal sinful tendency, nor the recognition of the vicious legacy of Adam: *parvuli baptizantur in remissionem peccatorum. quorum peccatorum, vel quo tempore peccaverunt? aut quo modo potest ulla lavacri in parvulis ratio subsistere, nisi iuxta illum sensum de quo paulo ante diximus – 'nullus mundus a sorde, nec si unius diei quidem fuerit vita eius super terram'?* (in *Luc. Hom.* 14.5).<sup>180</sup>

In the twelfth *Homily on Leviticus*, Origen discusses the Jewish ritual of purification and compares it to the Christian practice of baptism. He notes how both Jews and Christians recognize that the newly born are unclean: *omnis qui ingreditur hunc mundum, in quadam contaminatione effici dicitur. propter quod et Scriptura dicit 'nemo mundus a sorde, nec si unius diei fuerit vita eius'* (in *Lev. Hom.* 12.4). However, as Borret rightly says, this 'souillure n'est pas identifié au péché'.<sup>181</sup> As in the *Homilies on St Luke*, Origen identifies the *sordes* of infants as simply the inevitable consequence of corporeal existence. Indeed, throughout this chapter, Origen refers to the bodily process of procreation as the cause or reason for ritual uncleanness.<sup>182</sup> What we must carefully note is the absence of any reference to the doctrine of original sin. Infants are 'unclean' simply because they are physical creatures, not because they have somehow inherited the stain of Adam's sin. We also note how Origen continues the sermon with an allegorical interpretation of 'birth stain': we become contaminated when we sin.

Of course, infant baptism was far from common in the second and third centuries after Christ. It was much more usual at this date for Christians to be baptized as adults. Origen's various discussions of adult baptism reveal a similar reticence to recognize the hardships and handicaps of fallen man.<sup>183</sup> The

<sup>179</sup> Williams (1927), p.225 *ad loc.* writes that "Origen carefully distinguishes 'sordes' from 'peccatum'." Crouzel, Fournier and Périchon (1962), p.223 claim that the 'souillure' described here 'n'a rien de peccamineux.' See also Bigg (1913), p.247 for the same point.

<sup>180</sup> See Benoit (1994), p. lvii: "si l'Alexandrin atteste de manière indiscutable l'existence du baptême des tous petits enfants, on ne saurait faire de lui un représentant de la doctrine du péché originel."

<sup>181</sup> Borret (1981), p.178. Bigg (1913), p.247 agrees.

<sup>182</sup> *hoc ipso ergo quod in vulva matris est positus et quod materiam corporis ab origine paterni seminis sumit, in patre et in matre contaminatus dici potest* (in *Lev. Hom.* 12.4).

<sup>183</sup> For most of this paragraph, we are dependent upon Benoit (1994), pp.liv-lv. He bases his argument upon a variety of key texts: *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 17 and 30; *Homilies on Joshua* 4.2; *Homilies on Ezekiel* 6.5; *Homilies on Judges* 5.6

sacrament of baptism is certainly not seen as the necessary first stage, the *sine qua non* of the godly life. It does not wash away the stain of original sin and prepare the Christian for a lifestyle conversion. On the contrary, Origen believes that it is the task of the individual believer, of his own accord, to fight sin and the devil and to break the vicious habits of the 'old man'. It is only after this long struggle, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness,<sup>184</sup> that the convert can be baptized. Baptism is simply the public acknowledgement of a personal, private achievement.

## 5.6.

In the *Commentary on Romans*, Origen provides his fullest discussion of the fall and its consequences. The exegesis of Romans 5 fills the whole of the fifth book of the *Commentary*. It is unfortunate that the discussion survives only in Rufinus' Latin version, but there is little doubt that his translation represents the substance, albeit abbreviated, of the original.<sup>185</sup> But before we examine the details of this particular book, it would be useful to provide a brief overview of some of the major themes of the *Commentary* as a whole.

The Epistle to the Romans, like the Fourth Gospel, was a favourite text of the Gnostics. The Apostle's famous doctrine of predestination was seized upon as the perfect Scriptural proof of Gnostic determinism. In response to this 'misappropriation' of the Biblical text, Origen's *Commentary on Romans* took the form of a detailed and systematic refutation of Gnostic exegesis.<sup>186</sup> It is within this specific polemical arena that Origen develops the major themes of the *Commentary*. For example, he will not accept the possibility of moral ignorance. The most interesting discussion of this is Origen's exegesis of Romans 2.15, Paul's description of the righteous gentiles who *show the work of the Law written in their hearts*. This verse is interpreted as Biblical proof of the existence of a natural law, a moral code or standard inscribed on the hearts of all men by which they instinctively know what is right and what is wrong: *haec lex in cordibus gentium scripta est . . . verbi causa, ne homicidium, ne adulterium faciant, ne furentur, ne falsum testimonium dicant, et horum similia* (in *Rom.* 2.9; PG 14,

<sup>184</sup> Origen often interprets the wandering of the Jews as a typological metaphor for spiritual conversion. See Trigg (1983), p.193 for a further discussion of Origen's doctrine of adult baptism, particularly his symbolic use of the Crossing of the Jordan.

<sup>185</sup> There would have been no need for Rufinus to alter the original. At this date, questions of original sin, grace etc. were legitimate subjects of enquiry, with no fixed dogma. Moreover, Origen's discussions in the *Commentary on Romans* were widely applauded by Rufinus' readers as the perfect *riposte* to the determinists of the day. On this, see Amacker and Junod (2002), pp.9-14 and Bardy (1923), pp.90-92. It was not until Pelagius produced his own immensely controversial *Commentary on Romans* that Origen's views became suspect. On this last point, see de Bruyn (1993), pp.17-18, Bammell (1977), p. 426 and Souter (1922).

892B). This theory of moral conscience is repeated at *Commentary on Romans* 5.1 (PG 14, 1014 B), where Origen excuses a violent child on the grounds that he is not yet rational, i.e. has not yet reached the age of moral responsibility. The point is that no adult can claim that he did not know that he was sinning. For Origen, there is no such thing as moral ignorance, except in small children.

Armed with this detailed knowledge of virtue and vice, the individual is entirely free to choose one or the other. Origen's moral system is strictly voluntarist in the sense that knowledge of virtue is an insufficient cause of virtuous acts. There must be a subsequent act of will, a deliberate choice of what we know to be virtuous. In the *Commentary on Romans*, Origen cites the will of the rational soul as the *locus* of moral responsibility. It is this entirely free will which decides whether to follow the vicious desires of the body or the virtuous desires of the spirit.<sup>187</sup>

It is surely with the Gnostics firmly in mind that Origen develops his exegesis of the Pauline doctrine of predestination. Throughout the *Commentary on Romans*, Origen insists that predestination is simply another term for divine foreknowledge. It is because, and only because, God has foreseen the future virtue of *x* that *x* is described as predestined for salvation. For example, in his exegesis of Paul's description of himself as 'separated unto the Gospel of God' (Romans 1.1), Origen utterly rejects the implication of divine election. Predestination is simply the recognition of God's foreknowledge of our future acts (ἀνωτέρω δέ ἐστι τοῦ προορισμοῦ ἢ πρόγνωσης). The fact that these acts are freely chosen (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) is paramount (*Commentary on Romans* 1= *Philocalia* 25.1-4). When he discusses the formidable problem of weakness of will, Origen is similarly keen to stress the autonomy of the individual. It is the individual himself who is the cause of both his sinful habit and his subsequent reform. It is important to note that Origen does not explain weakness of will with reference to our fallen nature: to do so would undermine our moral responsibility. It is for this same reason that Origen must also argue that it is the individual himself, and not the grace of God, who overcomes the habit of sin. By constant effort, practice and training, anyone – even the most hardened sinner – can achieve virtue.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> In the *Preface* to the *Commentary*, Origen clearly states that his reason for writing was to refute the Gnostics. On this point, see Bammell (1977), p.424.

<sup>187</sup> A discussion of this, with particular reference to Origen's tricotomist anthropology, is given in section 8.2.

<sup>188</sup> Origen compares the achievement of virtue with the achievement of wisdom: *sed tamen cum voluntas adfuerit, adhibendus est labor, studium, sollicitudo, vigiliae, doctrina, institutio; et vix aliquando usu longo et mediatione continua sapiens efficitur. iste ergo ab initio quidem statim voluntatem habuit ut esset sapiens, sed non statim adfuerit ei opus sapientiae* (*Commentary on Romans* 6.9; PG 14, 1088B).

From this brief overview of the *Commentary on Romans* it must be clear that Origen's main aim was to prove to the Gnostics the power and influence of free will, specifically the liberty of indifference, and the importance of moral responsibility. The Epistle must be rescued from the clutches of the heretics and the words of the Apostle stripped of all negative connotations. Origen's exegesis is carefully crafted to suit this polemical agenda. His commentary on chapter 5, Paul's description of the fallen race and the legacy of Adam's sin, reveals a similar emphasis on individual autonomy.

Origen clearly believes that Adam was an historical individual and that he was the father of all men. We were all 'in his loins' when he sinned and hence were all expelled with him from Paradise.<sup>189</sup> But it must be emphasized that for Origen our presence in Adam was a purely physical presence and hence our inheritance from him is a purely physical inheritance, namely mortality: *per ipsum* (scil. Adam) *mors, quae ei ex praevaricatione venerat, consequenter et in eos pertransiit qui in lumbis eius habebantur* (*Commentary on Romans* 5.1 = PG 14, 1010A).<sup>190</sup> Origen also seems to accept the Pauline idea of the 'body of sin'. Crouzel refers to a Greek fragment of the *Commentary on Romans*,<sup>191</sup> where Origen refers the uniqueness of Christ's body to the fact that he was born of a Virgin. We have the same passage preserved in Rufinus' Latin version. Origen points out that Adam knew Eve only *post peccatum*. In this he would seem to be anticipating the Augustinian idea of 'sin' passed on via the sexual act.<sup>192</sup> Christ is exempt from this because he was born of a Virgin. He came only in the *likeness* of sinful flesh (Romans 3.5). What exactly Paul means here by the term *ὁμοίωσις* is not immediately obvious; the verse is debated even today. But in Origen's exegesis the stress is very much on the difference between Christ's flesh and ours, not the likeness. Similar remarks are made in the *Commentary on St Matthew* (fragment 11).<sup>193</sup> In this passage, Origen defines birth (*γέννησις*) as the inheritance of a sinful and passible nature. Christ's birth nature is without the usual sinful tendencies because he was born of a Virgin. Again, in the *Homilies on Leviticus*, it is the Virgin birth that exempts Christ from the *sordes* of ordinary human existence (*in Lev. Hom.*12.4). Origen seems therefore to

<sup>189</sup> *omnes homines qui in hoc mundo nascuntur, et nati sunt, in lumbis erant Adae, cum adhuc esset in paradiso; et omnes homines cum ipso vel in ipso expulsi sunt de paradiso, cum ipse depulsus est* (*Commentary on Romans* 5.1 = PG 14, 1009D-1010A).

<sup>190</sup> cf *Commentary on St. John* 1.20 (22) and 13.34 for the idea that universal mortality is the consequence of the fall. See also *Commentary on St John*, Fragments 45 and 120, where Origen argues that we inherit from Adam our physical constitution. These passages are referred to by Bammel (1994), p.90 but she has missed the main point that Origen does not mention any kind of spiritual or moral inheritance.

<sup>191</sup> *Journal of Theological Studies* 14 (1912), p.17. Passage discussed by Crouzel (1956), p.137.

<sup>192</sup> Williams (1927), p.304 notes Origen's horror of the sexual act, epitomized in his self-castration.

<sup>193</sup> Passage quoted in Bammel (1984), p.81

believe that there was a real and important difference between the nature of Adam before and after the fall and that it was his fallen nature that was passed on to us. We inherit from him the ‘body of sin’ or ‘sinful flesh’. But what does this mean in practical terms? Is it an admission of a universal and unavoidable propensity to sin? I do not think so. Although we may have to struggle with worse temptations than the unfallen Adam, we are still entirely free and perfectly able to resist these temptations.<sup>194</sup> Origen admits that the body is the source of unclean desires,<sup>195</sup> and this may well be the result of the fall, but this belief is no bar to his basic doctrine of individual freedom and moral responsibility.

Origen does not believe that we were ‘spiritually’ present in Adam, in the sense that we inherit our souls as well as our bodies from our first father. A traducianist theory would fit very ill with his overall theological system. Hence Origen does not believe that posterity inherited any moral or spiritual defects from Adam. There is no suggestion that fallen man is biased towards evil.<sup>196</sup> On the contrary, throughout Book Five of the *Commentary on Romans*, Origen emphasizes that it is entirely up to the individual whether he follow the example of Adam or the example of Christ. No one is automatically damned or automatically saved.<sup>197</sup> This is an early echo of Pelagius’ controversial theory.<sup>198</sup> We are all created free and must decide our own moral destiny: *per delictum mortis regnum datur, nec potest regnare in aliquo, nisi ius regni accipiat ex delicto. per quod indicari videtur, quod cum libera a Deo creata sit anima, ipsa se in servitutem redigat per delictum, et velut chirographa immortalitatis suae, quae a creatore suo acciperat, morti tradat* (*Commentary on Romans* 5.2 = PG 14, 1026C). By insisting that every soul is created free - (*libera a Deo creata*) – Origen is rejecting any suggestion that the fallen have a congenital bias towards sin and evil. Once again we see that the corner stone of

<sup>194</sup> For more on Origen’s understanding of temptation, see sections 10.1-10.2.

<sup>195</sup> See especially *de Principiis* 3.4, with our discussion at section 10.2.

<sup>196</sup> Origen’s position can be usefully compared to the Augustinian explanation of original sin. According to Augustine, mankind was present in Adam spiritually as well as physically when he sinned. It can therefore be said that we ourselves sinned, that we ourselves are responsible and hence that we ourselves can be blamed and punished. Any fair and coherent explanation of original sin is necessarily founded upon traducianism. On this, see Gilson (1961), p.51, Williams (1927), p.237 Bonner (1963), pp.371-73 and O’Daly (1983), pp.190-91.

<sup>197</sup> *initium quidem vitae datur a Christo, non invitis, sed credentibus et pervenitur ad perfectionem vitae perfectione virtutum, sicut et in mortem dudum praevaricationis similitudine et vitiorum expletione perventum est* (*Commentary on Romans* 5.2 = PG 14, 1024D-1025A).

<sup>198</sup> Consider also Origen’s discussions on ‘social heredity’, i.e. the doctrine that we are taught to sin by parents: *et non tam natura urgentur in mortem peccati quam disciplina* (*Commentary on Romans* 5.2 = PG 14, 1024A). This is also a Pelagian doctrine, another attempt at reconciling Paul’s doctrine of the fallen race with the freedom of the individual Christian. This point is found in Williams (1927), p.230.

Origen's anthropology is the freedom of each individual man. At one point, he even suggests that there were perfect men, i.e. men without sin, before the Incarnation.<sup>199</sup>

5.7.

It is clear therefore that Origen's tendency is to reduce the significance of the first sin and the consequences of the fall. He advocates a particularly optimistic doctrine of man in his present state. Although the theories of the mature Augustine are without precedent in the Patristic canon, it is nevertheless true to say that the Early Church as a whole had a clear and definite understanding of the limitations and disabilities of fallen man.<sup>200</sup> With such beliefs as a foundation, it could voice a firm conviction in the necessity for Redemption. Origen's insistence on the primacy of man's free will proves to be a major stumbling block to the full acceptance of traditional Christian doctrine.

If the above points are valid descriptions of Origen's system, it is very hard to incorporate within it the need for Redemption.<sup>201</sup> It is true that there are times when Origen hints at an intellectual consequence of the fall, that man has lost his understanding of God and that Christ's task is to re-educate him.<sup>202</sup> This explains Christ's rôle as teacher as described in the *Contra Celsum* and the *Commentary on St John*. But while this might go some way to explaining the need for some kind of intervention on the part of God, it cannot explain the need for a human, suffering Redeemer. Moreover, Hal Koch and Marguerite Harl are right to point out that the Logos' teaching and instruction is an on-going process: the Incarnation is certainly not the definitive soteriological solution. The Logos has been active in the world since the fall and will continue to be so until the final Apokatastasis.<sup>203</sup> This point is most clearly made at *Contra Celsum* 4.3-4, where Origen compares the Incarnation to the preaching of the patriarchs and prophets: both are examples of the Logos descending to earth to teach, guide and

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<sup>199</sup> *Commentary on Romans* PG 14, 1019AB.

<sup>200</sup> On this, see de Bruyn (1993), pp. 23 and 41.

<sup>201</sup> So, de Faye (1923), p. 230: "On peut la considerer comme une sorte d'annexe de sa doctrine générale du salut." So, too, Koch (1932), p. 76: "der Gedanke an eine Versöhnung kann in der Theologie des Origenes kein organisches Glied gebildet haben."

<sup>202</sup> On this, see Girod (1970), p.29.

<sup>203</sup> The main thesis of Koch's excellent book is the centrality of pedagogic providence in Origen's system. By quoting extensively from a variety of works, Koch shows how the salvific function of the Logos is constant and continual. It is not restricted to the historical fact of the Incarnation: "Die Aufgabe des Logos vor, während und nach der Inkarnation ist in allem wesentlichen dieselbe: nämlich als kluger Pädagoge die Seelen zu locken" (Koch (1932), p.64.) For further discussion of this important doctrine, see also von Harnack (1896) II, pp.366-7, Jaeger (1968), pp.66-7, Daniélou (1948), p.259 and Harl (1957), pp.107-8.

correct. The Incarnation is simply one aspect of a long series of providential revelations. As the Logos once spoke through the patriarchs and prophets, so he also spoke through the man Jesus.<sup>204</sup>

We conclude that Origen allows no central rôle to the Incarnation in his explanation of the Redemption. The fact that God became man, that he assumed a human body and a human soul,<sup>205</sup> has no direct salvific significance. It is merely the tool through which the epiphany is affected. This view is accepted by many eminent Origenists. Hal Koch writes that 'die Inkarnation an sich als geschichtliche Begebenheit für die spiritualisierende Auffassung Origenes' keine entscheidende Rolle wie in anderen theologischen System spielt.<sup>206</sup> de Faye similarly argues that 'il est clair que dans la doctrine de Rédemption de notre théologien il n'y a pas de place bien marquée pour la mort sur la croix.'<sup>207</sup> There are other scholars however who have challenged the conclusions of Koch and de Faye and who have tried to show that in Origen's doctrine of the Redemption the Cross is central and pivotal. This interpretation is championed by Crouzel, Daniélou and de Lubac.<sup>208</sup> de Lubac ventures to claim that 'peut-être n'y a-t-il point de vérité sur laquelle Origène insiste davantage que la rédemption par le sang de Jésus.'<sup>209</sup> He concludes that, for Origen, 'La Croix est le symbol absolu.'<sup>210</sup> How are we to deal with such a glaring difference of scholarly opinion?

#### 6.1.

The doctrine of the Redemption is the perfect example of the almost insurmountable difficulty in interpreting Origen. He constantly contradicts himself and attempts to confine him to one particular point of view are bound to fail.<sup>211</sup> There is ample evidence for the views of Koch and de Faye and there is ample evidence (soon to be discussed) for the views of Crouzel, Daniélou and de Lubac. As Harl points out, most Origenists have a particular axe to grind: they highlight texts which suit their own agenda and ignore the others.<sup>212</sup> Koch and de Faye are interested in seeing Origen as an influential conduit of Middle Platonic philosophy and in stressing his debt to particular pagan forebears. Crouzel, Daniélou and de Lubac are all keen to present Origen as a faithful son of the Church and to advocate

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<sup>204</sup> Moreover, Origen insists that this education continues after death: at *de Principiis* 2.11.6 and 3.8.9, he describes a kind of heavenly university in which souls pass through various levels as they learn more and more.

<sup>205</sup> Origen's doctrine of the Saviour's human soul is the subject of sections 8.1-9.6.

<sup>206</sup> Koch (1932), p.63-4.

<sup>207</sup> de Faye (1923), p.230.

<sup>208</sup> Crouzel (1989), pp.194-7, Daniélou (1948), pp.264-269 and de Lubac (1950), pp.86-91.

<sup>209</sup> de Lubac (1950), p.88.

<sup>210</sup> de Lubac (1950), p.91.

<sup>211</sup> Lyman (1993), p.44.

<sup>212</sup> Harl (1957), pp.334-5.

his rehabilitation.<sup>213</sup> It is these specific agendas that explain the different emphases of the different scholars. de Lubac, for example, would not want to draw attention to the rather heterodox arguments of the *de Principiis*. Similarly, de Faye would not quote from the *Homilies* in order to illustrate Origen's familiarity with Platonic philosophy.

Before we continue our discussion of Origen's atonement theory (theories), it would be useful to consider why and how Origen felt able to present such conflicting views on such a fundamental topic. It should first be remembered that Origen is writing within the tradition of Platonic dialectic, a tradition which eschewed definite conclusions in favour of the airing of various possibilities.<sup>214</sup> Origen rarely presents himself as a dogmatic teacher of Christian doctrine.<sup>215</sup> At *de Principiis* 3.6.9, for example, Origen invites his readers to muse on the problem of the Resurrection of the Body and choose between two alternative explanations. Lyman draws our attention to several other passages in which Origen deals with a difficulty by airing several possible answers as topics for discussion.<sup>216</sup> The *de Principiis* is similar in style to Plotinus' *Enneads* and may likewise reflect genuine classroom discussions.<sup>217</sup> It is also possible that Origen's beliefs changed and developed over time. It is claimed, for example, that the famous passage from the *Commentary on Romans* (5.9) in which Origen denies the possibility of a second fall is a deliberate and conscious rejection of the arguments of the *de Principiis*.<sup>218</sup>

Finally, and this is most important, it is well known that Origen suited his words to the intellectual and spiritual capacity of his readers. He understood how different people are helped and guided in different ways. Like the Logos, accommodating himself to our variant needs<sup>219</sup> and like God the Father meticulously careful of the peculiar wants of individual souls,<sup>220</sup> the Christian teacher must be constantly aware of his readership.<sup>221</sup> Origen's rôle model is St Paul who was always aware of the differing needs of his diverse flock. The Corinthians are weak and spiritually immature: to them, the

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<sup>213</sup> Harl (1957), pp.334-5. Dillon (1988), p.215 makes a very similar point: one's views of Origen depend almost entirely upon the kinds of texts one chooses to highlight. But Dillon warns against the black and white characterisation of Origen as *either* a conventional Biblical exegete *or* an esoteric Middle-Platonic philosopher. He believes that Origen's new system is a powerful and successful combination of the two.

<sup>214</sup> For a further discussion of the dialectical nature of Origen's writings, including relevant quotations and references, see the Introduction to chapter 1.

<sup>215</sup> So Bammell (1989), p. 83: "his aim was not to dogmatize."

<sup>216</sup> Lyman (1994), p. 44: *de Principiis* 2.3.7, 2.8.4 and 2.8.5.

<sup>217</sup> For a discussion of the dialectical form of the *Enneads*, see Fleet (1995), pp.xvii-xviii.

<sup>218</sup> So Molland (1932), p.162 and Otis (1958), p.103.

<sup>219</sup> This is the doctrine of the ἐπινοῦναι discussed in sections 5.3 and 5.4.

<sup>220</sup> See especially *de Principiis* 3.5.8

<sup>221</sup> See Harl (1957), p. 259: "de même que Jesus adapta son enseignement aux capacités diverses de ses auditeurs, ainsi le prédicateur chrétien doit prêcher le Christ d'une manière adaptée et progressive."



Apostle preaches Christ crucified. The Ephesians are much more advanced: to them, he preaches the higher, spiritual truths. Only Timothy and Luke are capable of receiving the greatest mysteries: to them alone St Paul reveals what he saw in the Third Heaven. This method, epitomized in Paul's claim that he became *all things to all men* (1 Corinthians 9. 22), inspired Origen's own teaching and explains why he felt able, even obliged, to present such a variety of arguments.<sup>222</sup>

It also explains why Origen wrote so competently in such a wide range of different genres. The *de Principiis* and the *Commentary on St John* were written for the intellectuals of the Church and it is here that we find the most complicated philosophies and the most daring theologies. In the *Contra Celsum*, a work of apologetics, Origen is constantly aware of the need to answer Celsus in his own terms, in ways that would make sense to a pagan philosopher. The depictions of Christ as a Stoic sage fit the present context perfectly, but would be very out of place in the Homilies. These sermons were written for the *simpliciores* of the Church at Alexandria and Caesarea. Such people were not to be trusted with the heady doctrines developed in Origen's early works<sup>223</sup> and would not be impressed by comparisons of Christ to Epictetus. What they needed and expected was moral guidance, supported by conventional exegesis. In the Homilies, Origen appears as a simple presbyter urging his flock to mend their wicked ways. The *Dialogue with Heraclides* is different again. It is a work written by a senior churchman, investigating a possible heresy.<sup>224</sup> Origen's remarks are disappointingly bland and conventional; everything he says would have been immediately and obviously acceptable.

Origen is very sensitive to the intellectual and spiritual capacities of his readers; the different genres in which he wrote reflect the different needs of different groups. Interpretations of Origen thus depend, to a very large extent, on the particular works consulted. The arguments of the Homilies are very different from the arguments of the *de Principiis* or the *Commentary on St John*.<sup>225</sup> It seems to me that those scholars who claim that Origen's doctrine of the Redemption is Biblical in origin and that it takes full

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<sup>222</sup> For a discussion of this topic and for quotations from pertinent passages, see Lebreton (1948), pp.943-4.

<sup>223</sup> See Byard Bennett (1997), p.196. Bardy (1923), pp.10 and 14 and Trigg (1981), p.6 describe Origen's annoyance at Ambrose for publishing the *de Principiis*: such 'higher truths' were not for public consumption. At *Contra Celsum* 5.19, Origen quotes the words of Tobit – *it is good to hide a king's mystery* – as Scriptural justification for this reticence.

<sup>224</sup> For a discussion of the context and setting of the *Dialogue*, see Scherer (1960), pp.16-24.

<sup>225</sup> On this point, see Jaeger (1968), p.129. Jaeger contrasts the different conclusions reached by de Faye and by Völker, pointing out that the latter based himself on the Homilies and so concluded that Origen was a conventional urban pastor.

account of the salvific value of the Cross are relying too much on the Homilies, to the exclusion of the more speculative and (arguably) more important works.<sup>226</sup>

7.1.

In his analysis of Origen's doctrine of the Incarnation, Crouzel refers to an interesting work by the Spanish scholar Jean Alcaín that purports to be an exhaustive analysis of Origen's doctrine of the Redemption.<sup>227</sup> Alcaín organizes his discussion according to various 'models' by which Origen attempts to explain the Redemption. Crouzel concludes that each of the models discussed depends upon the humanity of the Saviour for its efficacy.<sup>228</sup>

One of the most important models discussed by Crouzel is the 'warrior model', according to which the Redemption is presented as Christ's victory over the devil and the opposing powers. Daniélou also emphasizes this scheme and argues that it was the usual way for the Early Church to explain the Redemption.<sup>229</sup> Christ's death on the Cross becomes, paradoxically, the moment of his greatest triumph. There is of course a Scriptural base for this kind of explanation (e.g. Colossians 2.14-15) and it is hardly surprising that we find Origen, the Pauline scholar, repeating the dictum. One of Origen's favourite images is of the devil being nailed to the Cross in Christ's place. The Old Testament story of Joshua (Ἰησοῦς in Greek) defeating the King of Ai and hanging him on a nearby tree becomes a type for Christ's victory over the devil (*in Jesu Nave Hom.* 8.3).<sup>230</sup> The idea of the Crucifixion as a military triumph is certainly important to Origen,<sup>231</sup> but Crouzel is surely wrong to refer the victory to the Saviour's humanity. It is Christ's glorious divinity that crushes the devil and his minions, not the man on the Cross.<sup>232</sup> As we argue in section 16.3, Origen's descriptions of the Crucified Christ are descriptions of the great and glorious God, acting with kingly power and might. The pain of the Passion (physical and mental) is very far from Origen's mind. And the fact of Christ's death – the death of a suffering *man* – is irrelevant. For Celsus and his fellows, the death of Christ was an obvious target of ridicule. As an apologist, Origen feels obliged to turn the Crucifixion into a scene of final victory, the definitive proof of the Saviour's power and glory. Christ's death becomes the greatest of

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<sup>226</sup> The question of the importance and 'value' of Origen's different works will be discussed in section 7.5.

<sup>227</sup> *Cautiverio y redención del hombre en Orígenes* (Bilbao 1973).

<sup>228</sup> Crouzel (1989), p.194.

<sup>229</sup> Daniélou (1948), pp.264-7.

<sup>230</sup> For the same image, see *in Lev. Hom.* 9.5.

<sup>231</sup> See also *in Jesu Nave Hom.* 1.1; *in Cant. Hom.* 2.11; *in Num. Hom.* 17.6 and 18.4; *in Ex. Hom.* 5 and 11; *Contra Celsum* 1.60, *Commentary on St Matthew* 12.18 and 40.

his miracles. In the Early Church, the figure of *Christus Triumphator* was usually identified with the Resurrected or Exalted Christ. For Origen, even the man on the Cross is a victorious warrior. This is a deliberate attempt to refute any suggestion of humiliation or defeat, however momentary. In the words of Cadiou: “le Christ souffrant d’Origène apparaît d’abord comme le cavalier de l’Apocalypse, dressé sur un cheval blanc, symbol de la vérité qui répond son éclat, les vêtements tiens du sang triomphal.”<sup>233</sup> The defeat of the devil is the victory of Christ’s divinity. In this explanation of the Redemption, the Saviour’s humanity has (once again) no soteriological rôle to play.<sup>234</sup>

Moreover, Christ’s triumph is certainly not the definitive defeat of the opposing powers. Origen insists that each one of us must fight a personal battle and win a personal victory. Once more we can detect a proto-Pelagian slant in Origen’s soteriology: Christ is basically a rôle model, an example to imitate. This idea comes across most clearly in the first of the *Homilies on Joshua*. Origen begins by comparing the victories of Joshua over the heathen to Christ’s victories over the opposing powers. But, as is usual in his sermons, Origen’s main aim is moral exhortation. He urges the congregation to imitate Christ and, like him, defeat the devil. Famous Biblical verses which describe the triumph of Christ are applied to the individual Christian soul, winning its own personal victory:

*denique dum nos bellum gerimus adversus inimicos nostros, at colluctamur adversus principatus et potestates et rectores tenebrarum harum, adversus spiritalia nequitiae in coelestibus, sol nobis iustitiae indesinenter assistit, nec deserit unquam, nec festinat occumbere, quia ipse dixit 'Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus' non solum autem duplicatio die nobiscum est, sed omnibus diebus est usque ad consummationem saeculi, donec et nos obtineamus adversarios nostros ... sunt quaedam adversarium potestatum gentes diabolicae, adversum quas nobis certamen geritur, et agones in hac vita desudantur. quantascunque ergo ex his gentes pedibus nostris subdiderimus*<sup>235</sup> *quantoscunque in*

<sup>232</sup> This point is explicit in *Contra Celsum* 1.60: Christ overthrows the demons because of his divine power (τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ θεϊότητος).

<sup>233</sup> Cadiou (1935), p.368. He refers explicitly to *Commentary on St John* 2.5 (4), where Origen actually quotes Revelations 19.11.

<sup>234</sup> c.f. Harl (1957), p.359: “lorsqu’il rappelle la Croix, c’est comme signe de victoire . . . laissant les souffrances à l’homme . . . Origène songe surtout aux manifestations du Fils . . . il s’intéresse au Verbe incarné, surtout dans les moments où il cesse d’être chair; bien loin d’être un devot du Christ humilié, souffrant, crucifié, Origène s’attache à suivre le Christ se révélant comme Dieu transfiguré, mourant sur la Croix, mais comme un triompheur, ressuscitant.”

<sup>235</sup> c.f. Hebrews 1.13 and 10.13, in which it is *Christ* who tramples his enemies under his feet.

*certamine vicerimus, ipsorum regiones, ipsorum provincias et regna, Iesu nobis Domino distribuyente, capiemus (in Iesu Nave Hom. 1.1).*<sup>236</sup>

Origen will not accept that Christ won the victory on our behalf. This would undermine his fundamental belief in the importance of individual autonomy. Origen's sense of fair play and of the just application of praise and blame requires each individual to work out his own salvation and to fight his own battles.<sup>237</sup> Even Crouzel admits as much: "This victory (scil. Christ's) does not automatically ensure our freedom and that is a point that must always be kept in mind, especially when reading Origen, the theologian *par excellence* of free will."<sup>238</sup> If we ask what Christ's victory over the devils has actually achieved for individual sinners, the answer is "very little." It is certainly not the case that the devils have lost their powers and no longer menace the world. *de Principiis* 3.6 is proof enough that Origen was very aware of the tremendous might and influence of the opposing powers and of the need for constant strength and vigilance.

7.2.

Another 'model' discussed by Crouzel/Alcain is the ritual model. Crouzel provides a long list of references in which Origen supposedly explains the Redemption in terms of a ritual, with the crucified Christ playing the part of the definitive sin offering. In the eighth *Homily on Genesis*, we are provided with a typological exegesis of the sacrifice of Isaac. Christ appears as both Abraham and the ram sacrificed in Isaac's place, i.e. both priest and victim (*in Gen. Hom. 8.9*). But there is no analysis of exactly how Christ, as the Lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world, or what the sacrifice actually achieves. The ritual model is also used in the *Homilies on Leviticus*. In the ninth Homily, Origen attempts a Christianization of the Jewish Festival of Yom Kippur. Christ is the true High Priest, who entered the Holy of Holies (Heaven) on the true Day of Atonement, when he ascended to his Father to propitiate him. Christ is also identified with the man appointed to drive the scapegoat (the devil) into the wilderness (hell) (*in Lev. Hom. 9.5*). But, in his usual homiletic style, Origen concludes by warning his congregation of the need for moral virtue. Christ intercedes only for those who deserve his prayers, for those who pray and fast and meditate on the Gospel. He does not pray for sinners, for those who

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<sup>236</sup> c.f. *in Ex. Hom.* 11. Once again, it is the individual believer who must win his own victory over the Devil. God will not fight our battles for us.

<sup>237</sup> See Harl (1957), p.295: "La Rédemption se présente donc comme une victoire du Christ, que le Chrétien put désormais reproduire . . . donner aux esclaves le courage de se libérer eux mêmes."

<sup>238</sup> Crouzel (1989), p.195.

have followed the scapegoat into the Wilderness.<sup>239</sup> Once again, the onus is on the individual to work out his own salvation. It should also be noted that in this passage, there is no mention of Christ as the sacrifice, only as the priest. Christ's salvific importance lies in his petitioning of the Father, not in his death on the Cross.

In the *Commentary on St. John* Origen returns to the theme of the Lamb of God and provides us with a more detailed discussion. At *Commentary on St. John* 1.32 (37), in his famous overview of the various Christological titles, Origen considers John the Baptist's words – *Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world* (John 1.29). Christ's death is then presented as a purification and as a medicine against the opposing powers: ὅπως τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες καθαρῶμεν, ἀναδιδομένῳ τρόπον φαρμάκου ἐπὶ τὰς ἀντικειμένας ἐνεργεία. But the ritual model soon becomes the warrior model as Origen turns to discuss Christ's battles with the devil. Christ is depicted as fighting against those powers who wage a continual war against the human race. The fight will not end until he has trampled all his enemies under his feet. An important point to note is Origen's insistence that this is an on-going process. The Crucifixion did not win the war. Once again, the significance of the Incarnation is worryingly reduced. It is but one small part of a complex scheme of providential intervention. Origen draws attention to the fact that John spoke in the present tense. This shows that the Lamb of God is *constantly* taking away the sins of the world:

ὁ Ἰωάννης δεικνὺς αὐτόν φησιν· Ἴδε ὁ ἁμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου· οὐχὶ ὁ μέλλων μὲν αἶρειν οὐχὶ δὲ καὶ αἴρων ἤδη, καὶ οὐχὶ ὁ ἅπας μὲν οὐχὶ δὲ καὶ αἴρων ἐστίν. τὸ γὰρ αἶρειν ἐνεργεῖ ἐπὶ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, ἕως ἀπὸ παντός τοῦ κόσμου ἀφαιρεθῇ ἡ ἁμαρτία (*Commentary on St John* 1.32 (37)).

At *Commentary on St. John* 6.51-55 (32-37), Origen provides his fullest discussion of the Johannine formula. He repeats the idea of the *Homilies on Genesis* that Christ is both High Priest and Victim. His divine nature sacrifices his human nature.<sup>240</sup> Origen must at all costs avoid the inference that Christ was simply the passive sacrifice. He quotes one of his favourite Biblical verses – *No man taketh (my soul) from me. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again* (John 10.18) – to prove the point. The voluntary nature of Christ's death is extremely important to Origen; in one passage he

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<sup>239</sup> *non enim exorat pro his, qui in sortem veniunt eius hirci, qui emittitur in desertum. pro illis exorat tantum, qui sunt sors Domini, qui eum pro foribus expectant, qui non recedunt a templo, ieiuniis et orationibus vacantes* (in *Lev. Hom.* 9.5).

<sup>240</sup> ὁ δὲ προσαγαγὼν τοῦτον τὸν ἁμνὸν ἐπὶ τὴν θυσίαν ὁ ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἦν θεός, μέγας ἀρχιερεὺς (*Commentary on St John* 6.53 (35)).

explicitly states that Christ killed himself.<sup>241</sup> Christ on the Cross is not an agonized, dying man, but the omnipotent God calmly deciding the exact moment to release his soul from his body. For Origen, it would be an insult to the majesty of the Redeemer to suggest that the Crucifixion caused Christ's death. It was Christ himself, as both Priest and Victim, who engineered the whole Passion – from the arrest in Gethsemane to the moment of his death.<sup>242</sup>

Origen goes on to list the various ways in which the Lamb of God can be said to 'take away the sin of the world':

1. He cancels our debts by his blood.<sup>243</sup>
2. He purifies heaven and earth.<sup>244</sup>
3. He removes all trace of past sin.<sup>245</sup>
4. He defeats the opposing powers.<sup>246</sup>

We can therefore have confidence, because we know that the world has been vanquished:

καὶ θαρρεῖν γοῦν θλιβόμενοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ διδασκόμεθα, τὴν αἰτίαν τοῦ θαρρεῖν μανθάνοντες ταύτην εἶναι, τὸ νενικῆσθαι τὸν κόσμον καὶ δηλονότι ὑποτετάχθαι τῷ νικήσαντι αὐτόν (*Commentary on St John* 6.55 (37)).

These chapters could perhaps support the conclusions of Crouzel, Daniélou and de Lubac that Origen did find a place for the Cross in his theory of the Redemption. But against this, it must be said that Origen's comments are forced upon him by the words of the Gospel. As a meticulous exegete, he is obliged to comment in detail on every verse. Moreover, his remarks in these chapters hardly constitute a coherent theory of the soteriological significance of the Crucifixion. They are basically a cobbling together of various Pauline ideas, with no attempt to explain the exact processes involved. For example, what does it mean to say that Christ has 'cancelled our debt'? To whom was the debt owed? How was it cancelled? Why did Christ cancel it, and not one of those actually indebted?

At *Commentary on St. John* 10.16-17 (13) Origen takes a final look at the figure of the Paschal Lamb, but offers a very different explanation. His comments form part of a detailed discussion of the Jewish festival of the Passover. The basic thrust of the exegesis is that the rites and rituals described in the Old

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<sup>241</sup> *Commentary on St John* 19.16 (4).

<sup>242</sup> For a detailed discussion of this important subject, see sections 16.1-16.3.

<sup>243</sup> *Commentary on St John* 6.53 (35); *ibid.* 6.55 (37).

<sup>244</sup> *ibid.* 6.53 (35).

<sup>245</sup> *ibid.* 6.55 (37).

<sup>246</sup> *ibid.* 6.55 (37). This 'warrior model' is repeated a few lines below, where Christ appears as the conquering hero (*ibid.* 6.55 (37)).

Testament are symbols and types of spiritual truths. The Passover must be understood allegorically, as pointing to some fundamental *Christian* reality. The most obvious and most popular typological interpretation of the Passover was to see the Paschal Lamb as the Crucified Christ making the definitive atonement for the sins of the world. Origen does refer, briefly, to this idea,<sup>247</sup> but his main point is to see the Lamb of God as the Word of God in the literal sense, i.e. as the writings of Holy Scripture. As the Hebrews were commanded to eat the slaughtered lamb, so Christians must eat the Lamb of God, i.e. study Scripture. This is the path to salvation. Origen explains the Lord's command that the Lamb be *roasted with fire* (Exodus 12.9) as meaning that the Bible must not be interpreted literally – 'raw' – but must be 'cooked' by the fire of the enquiring mind seeking the spiritual truths. It is important that Origen does not understand the 'eating' of the Lamb of God in a sacramental sense, as referring to the Eucharist. In keeping with the spirituality of his overall theology, Origen places very little emphasis on the physical act of communion. While such motions might be of use to the *simpliciores*, the mature Christian needs only the spiritual Eucharist – the study of scripture.<sup>248</sup>

If readers of the *Commentary on St John* expected a Christian exegesis of the Passover that saw Christ's death upon the Cross as the definitive sin-offering, they would be severely disappointed. Origen's Christ does take away the sin of the world, but the Crucifixion is certainly not the defining moment in this process. The Word of God is constantly at work and it is through a gradual process of education and enlightenment that individuals come to salvation. Origen's main emphasis at *Commentary on St John* 10.16-17 (13) is on the educative rôle of the Logos, particularly the way in which he communicates with man through the medium of Scripture.

7.4.

<sup>247</sup> *Commentary on St John* 10.17 (13).

<sup>248</sup> Stone (1909), pp.26-8 provides a useful overview of Origen's doctrine of the Eucharist. He concludes that, for Origen, the eating of the flesh of Christ almost invariably meant the study of Scripture. At *Commentary on St John* 32.24 (16), Origen argues that, although the physical act of communion might be useful to the simple, those capable should eat the Word of God 'spiritually', i.e. study the Bible (περὶ τοῦ τροφίμου τῆς ἀληθείας λόγου). Daniélou (1944) discusses this topic in great detail. He concludes: "Nous ne pouvons pas ne penser, en lisant ces textes, à l'opposition qu'Origène faisant, à propos de Pâque, entre la foule, qui a besoin de signes sensibles, et les spirituels, qui n'ont besoin que de la Pâque spirituelle. Le culte visible et des sacrements semblent nécessaires seulement pour les simples. Il y a une affirmation claire de la supériorité de la manducation spirituelle. Il faut noter, à ce sujet, que pour Origène, le pain est un symbole du Logos" (p.77). Daniélou compares this attitude to the Eucharist to Origen's general tendency to ignore the significance of the historical Christ and to reject the literal interpretation of the Bible. Origen's whole theological enterprise is to find the spiritual truths hidden behind the physical symbols. While the Incarnated Christ, the act of Communion and the literal reading of the Bible might be of use to children and recent converts, the mature Christian has passed far beyond such banalities (pp. 260-261). I find myself in full agreement with Daniélou's remarks here.

One final ‘model’ used by Origen to explain the Redemption is the mercantile model. According to this model, Christ buys us back (literally ‘redeems’ us) from the devil. This is of course a good Scriptural metaphor (Mark 10.45, Colossians 1.14, 1 Peter 1.18-19, Ephesians 1.7). Origen often argues that Christ’s blood was the ransom paid to the devil in return for the captive souls.<sup>249</sup> This explanation of the Redemption would indeed seem to hinge upon the humanity of the Saviour, specifically his death upon the Cross. But the theory involves a worrying number of unsolved problems. First and foremost amongst these is the question why God would ever have made such a pact with the devil. Could he not simply have snatched the souls back, with the power and might of his divinity? The Apologists, who first elaborated the ransom theory, argued that the justice of God demanded that he act fairly even towards his greatest enemy. As the devil did not capture man by brute force – the first sin was freely chosen – so God must not redeem man by brute force.<sup>250</sup> Yet this idea of fair play would have meant very little to Origen, for whom the deception of the devil was axiomatic.<sup>251</sup>

The most important deception of the devil is described at *Commentary on St Matthew* 16.8, where Origen suggests that the ransom promised to the devil was Christ’s human soul. In return for this, the devil had agreed to release the souls of fallen man. Of course the ransom will not be paid. The devil was a fool to think that he would ever be able to keep hold of such a soul:

τίνι δὲ ἔδωκε τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν; οὐ γὰρ δὴ τῷ θεῷ μήτι οὖν τῷ πονηρῷ; οὗτος γὰρ ἐκράτει ἡμῶν, ἕως δοθῇ τὸ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν αὐτῷ λύτρον ἢ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ψυχῇ, ἀπατηθέντι ὡς δυναμένῳ αὐτῆς κυριεῦσαι καὶ οὐχ ὁρῶντι ὅτι οὐ φέρει τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ κατέχειν αὐτὴν βάσανον (*Commentary on St Matthew* 16.8).

The episode concludes with the triumphant soul of Christ leading the kidnapped souls out of hell. The devil loses both the ransom and the booty, because he has failed to understand the peculiar nature of the soul of Christ. The crux of this story is that Christ’s soul was not the soul of an ordinary human. Once again, we see Origen’s insistence that the Saviour’s divinity be the lynch-pin of the redemptive process. This ransom theory is not a fair exchange between two consenting parties. Christ’s descent into hell, as

<sup>249</sup> in *Ex. Hom.* 6.9; *Commentary on St John* 6.53 (35); *Commentary on Romans* 2.13.

<sup>250</sup> On the Apologists, see Grenstead (1920), pp.36-7, 88-90. Later writers who use the theory similarly emphasize God’s fair dealings with the devil (*ibid.* pp. 44-49). On the general subject of the devil’s rights, see Williams (1927), pp.292-4.

<sup>251</sup> See section 10.5.



described in the *Commentary on St Matthew*, is a violent storming of the enemy camp and a snatching back of hostages. We are back to the warrior model.<sup>252</sup>

#### 7.5.

While it might be possible for Alcaín, Crouzel, Daniélou and de Lubac to wade through the whole Origenian corpus and pick out every reference, however small, to the rôle of the Crucifixion in the process of Redemption, it remains the case that for Origen this is not the definitive salvific event. He might refer, from time to time, to standard Biblical explanations of the Redemption, but these are merely passing comments; they do not constitute a satisfactory theology of *cur deus homo*. Indeed, the very fact that Origen offers his readers so many different 'models' would seem to suggest that he has not fully understood the exact ways and means by which Christ redeemed the world.<sup>253</sup> When Origen does offer a traditional explanation, it is usually an exegetical necessity, a response forced upon him by the words of Scripture.<sup>254</sup> A congregation listening to a Homily on the binding of Isaac would expect the standard typological reading.

In his major philosophical works, the *de Principiis*, the *Contra Celsum* and the *Commentary on St John*, Origen has very little to say about the Cross. It is in the Homilies, preached before the *simpliciores* of the Church, that we find most of the references to the soteriological function of the Crucifixion. de Lubac has clearly read, in detail, the whole of Origen's oeuvre, but he has failed to note that the evidence for his claim that the Cross is the 'symbol absolu' comes almost entirely from the Homilies. This is Origen's message to simple believers, and it would be useful to them as milk is useful to babies.<sup>255</sup> Only the philosophically astute could be trusted with the theories of the *de Principiis* and the *Commentary on St John*. And I believe that it is here that we find the true Origen. These are works written for men who have achieved the Origenist ideal: mature, philosophically intelligent believers who have passed beyond the belief in Christ crucified and who are capable of understanding God as God. The theological system developed in these works has no place for the central Christian idea of a Saviour who suffers and dies. The importance of the Incarnation lies not in the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, but in the revealing of God to man.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> For the Patristic depiction of the Harrowing of Hell as a violent storming of the Gates of Hades, see McCulloch (1930), pp.217-222.

<sup>253</sup> So Grenstead (1929), p.188.

<sup>254</sup> de Faye (1923), p.76.

<sup>255</sup> On this point, see Harl (1957), p.266 (à propos fragment 12 of the *Commentary on I Corinthians*).

<sup>256</sup> We could almost say that the rôle of Origen's Christ is to impart a salvific gnosis. There is a strong likeness to Gnostic theories of redemption. de Faye (1957), pp.216-217 writes that Christ 'est un

It is the conclusion of this section that Origen's understanding of the fall and of salvation leaves very little room for a Redeemer or even for a Redemption. Specifically, Origen has failed to understand the full importance of the Saviour's assuming of a human body and the consequent suffering and death experienced by Christ. This is part of a general failure to take adequate cognisance of the humanity of the Saviour. It is an examination of this Christological bias that forms the back-bone of the present chapter. The theory of the soul of Christ developed in the *de Principiis* provides the philosophical foundation for this bias. It explains the process by which the Saviour's human nature was entirely subjected to his divinity.

#### ORIGEN'S THEORY OF THE SOUL OF CHRIST.

##### 8.1.

Origen was the first theologian of either the Eastern or Western Church to deal in any detail with the soul of Christ.<sup>257</sup> The main philosophical reason for believing Christ to have assumed a human soul is given at *de Principiis* 2.6.3.<sup>258</sup> It is by means of this soul that Origen feels able to explain the mechanics of the process of the Incarnation. It explains how God was able to mingle with a body. The soul of Christ acts as the crucial intermediary which unites these two fundamentally opposed entities. It is a human soul that is able to play this vital rôle of intermediary, because it is not contrary to the nature of soul either to assume a body or to receive God:

*hac ergo substantia animae inter deum carnemque mediante (non enim possibile erat dei naturam corpori sine mediatore misceri) nascitur, ut dicimus, deus-homo, illa substantia media existente, cui utique contra naturam non erat corpus assumere. sed neque rursum anima illa, utpote substantia rationalis, contra naturam habuit capere deum.*

With this argument, Origen provides a very powerful response to the major pagan objection to the possibility of the Incarnation. As we have seen, pagan philosophy of the second and third centuries was

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révéléateur. Il illumine des âmes par la gnose qui sauve.' Dillistone (1968), pp.47-48 makes the same points. de Faye also points out that the Origenist idea (developed in the *de Principiis*) that the end is the same as the beginning is Gnostic in origin (*ibid.* pp. 211-213). Harl (1957), p. 111, however, is keen to distinguish Origen from his heretical contemporaries by claiming that in his system knowledge was the end, but not the means. In saying this, Harl has failed to grasp the fundamental importance to Origen of Christ the teacher.

<sup>257</sup> It was referred to, but only briefly, by Tertullian and Irenaeus. So, Wiles (1965), pp.140-41.

<sup>258</sup> In this section, we concentrate on the *de Principiis*. In the *Dialogue with Heraclides* (5-7) Origen discusses the *soteriological* importance of Christ assuming a human soul. It seems to me, however, that Origen's main concern in these chapters is to prove, against the docetics, that Christ assumed a real

rigorously dualist and could make no sense of the idea that God would ever contaminate himself with the filth of matter. Origen himself was of a sufficiently philosophical turn of mind to adopt many of the tenets of dualism.<sup>259</sup> He accepted the fundamental belief of his pagan intellectual contemporaries that spirit (God) and matter (body) were opposites and could not associate with one another without the help of an intermediary. By claiming that it was Christ's human soul that played this vital rôle of intermediary, Origen is explaining the central Christian mystery in a way that would make sense to any third century thinker. His explanation of the mechanics of the process is entirely consistent with established philosophical doctrines. Few philosophers would have disagreed that a soul, by nature, is equally able to be united with God as to assume a body. The fall and return of souls was a story told by almost every philosopher Origen would have been likely to read. He is simply making new use of a very old theory.

At *de Principiis* 2.6.5-7, Origen anticipates a possible objection to his belief in Christ's human soul. People will point out that he believes, indeed has insisted throughout the *de Principiis*, that every soul enjoys the liberty of indifference, that they are free to choose between virtue and vice.<sup>260</sup> This would mean that Christ, insofar as he possesses a human soul, must be *boni malique capax*. A belief in the liberty of indifference is the corner-stone of Origen's moral philosophy and the major argument of his anti-Gnostic polemic. So why would it be a problem to believe that Christ was capable of both good and evil? Why should Origen devote so much time and effort, three chapters of dense and complex argument, to dealing with this anonymous objection? The answer to these questions lies in Origen's peculiar understanding of the freedom of the will. For Origen, the ability to choose between good and evil is not a simple solution to the problem of determinism. Like Plotinus and Augustine, Origen recognizes the dangers involved in this kind of freedom. The ability to choose evil is in fact an ontological flaw that blights the created order. The goodness of God is independent of this kind of moral choice, superior to it, and for Origen it is imperative that his Incarnate Son be similarly exempt. The remaining chapters of *de Principiis* 2.6 are devoted to Origen's attempts to individualize the soul of Christ and to exempt it from the liberty of indifference. But before we examine the arguments, we must understand their philosophical background. What was Origen's understanding of moral

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human body. Mention of the Saviour's soul and spirit are really just asides to make a convenient Christological formula.

<sup>259</sup> On Origen's dualist sympathies, see section 4.1.

<sup>260</sup> *quam utique animarum naturam boni malique capacem per omnes disputationes nostras frequenter ostendimus.*

freedom?<sup>261</sup> Why did it seem to him so dangerous and so harmful to have the ability to choose between good and evil?

## 8.2.

According to Origen, the seat of moral freedom is the rational soul.<sup>262</sup> The will of this soul is entirely its own master.<sup>263</sup> Although it can be influenced and guided by good or evil angels, it remains the prerogative of each soul to decide whether to reject or to accept the suggestions of these spirits.<sup>264</sup> Moreover, by claiming that each of us has a good and an evil attendant angel, suggesting (simultaneously) good or evil thoughts, Origen re-inforces the claim that it is the individual himself who makes the choice between *equal* influences.<sup>265</sup> Origen's discussions of the freedom of the will are often set within the context of a trichotomist anthropology.<sup>266</sup> The soul is envisaged as the middle, morally neutral entity, absolutely free to choose whether to follow the vicious desires of the body or the virtuous desires of the spirit. The *locus classicus* for this theory is *de Principiis* 3.4.2:

*constat quod huius animae voluntas media quaedam est inter carnem et spiritum, uni sine dubio e duobus serviens et obtemperans, cuicumque obtemperare deligerit quaeque cum se delectationibus*

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<sup>261</sup> In this section, we use the term 'freedom' as short hand for the 'liberty of indifference'. As Armstrong (1992), pp. 121-2 rightly notes, the theologians of the ancient world had two very different concepts of freedom. The first was the liberty of indifference, the ability to choose between moral alternatives. The second was the freedom to choose only the good and the reasonable.

<sup>262</sup> Rationality is an extremely important aspect of Origen's explanation of morality. It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to discuss the topic in detail, but see section 5.6. Otis (1958), p.102 is wrong to say that Origen, 'like Socrates, did not believe that anyone could knowingly do evil.' It would upset his sense of fair play and the importance of individual freedom to believe that sin could be excused by ignorance. On this, see Benjamins (1993), p.218.

<sup>263</sup> In the *de Principiis*, Origen uses a wide range of vocabulary to convey the idea of 'will'. We are, of course, considerably hampered by the fact that much of the work survives only in Rufinus' Latin version. We do however possess the Greek text of chapter 3.1, in which we often find the technical Stoic terms προαίρεσις, συγκατάθεσις, ῥοπή τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ, εὐδόκησις, τὸ αὐτεξουσίον and τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν. In Rufinus' Latin translations of the *de Principiis*, the most common word for 'will' is *voluntas*, presumably translating θέλημα. In the *Commentary on St John* we most often find τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν and προαίρεσις. In the *Commentary on Romans*, Origen uses *voluntas*, *arbitrium* and *libertas arbitrii*. I do not feel that it is possible to find any semantic pattern in Origen's choice of vocabulary. For example, the term *voluntas* is used equally of the unchanging will of God and the fickle will of men and women. Rist (1974) argues that the term προαίρεσις is used exclusively for rational decisions. This is not the case (see, for example, *Commentary on St Matthew* fragment 141).

<sup>264</sup> God makes much use of his angels to teach and encourage fallen souls. Similarly, the devil sends his demons to sow evil thoughts into the minds of the unwary. See especially *de Principiis* 2.10.7, 3.2, 3.5.4-6.

<sup>265</sup> *de Principiis* 3.2.4. On this, see Crouzel (1962), pp.171-2.

<sup>266</sup> On this important topic, see the discussions by Crouzel (1956), pp.131-3 and (1962), pp.171-2. See also Verbeke (1945), pp.456-7.

*carnis subdiderit, carnales homines facit, cum vero se spiritui iunxerit, in spiritu esse hominem facit et propter hoc spiritalem nominari.*<sup>267</sup>

It is the will of the soul that is in complete control of an individual's moral status. It decides whether a man leads a virtuous/spiritual life or a vicious/carnal life.<sup>268</sup> This moral theory has a great number of advantages. Most importantly, it avoids the simplistic and question-begging dualism advocated (most of the time) by St. Paul, by Plato and almost all his followers, by Philo and at times even by Origen himself (e.g. *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* 94). A dualism which envisages the moral dilemma as simply the struggle between good and evil is an insufficient explanation of virtue and vice. There surely needs to be a third element to decide the outcome of this struggle. For Origen, it is the soul which fulfils the vital rôle of independent arbiter.<sup>269</sup>

At *Commentary on St. John* 32.18 (11), Origen again cites the soul as the crucial intermediary that chooses between good and evil: τηρήσας ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γραφῇ διαφορὰν ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος καὶ μέσον μὲν τι θεωρῶν εἶναι τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ἐπιδεχομένην ἀρετὴν καὶ κακίαν. At *Commentary on Romans* 1.18 (PG 14, 866A- 867B), Origen develops an elaborate metaphor to illustrate the theory. The soul is imagined as the owner of a house, with the spirit and the body acting as advisors (*consilarii*); outside the house, in separate groups, stand the virtues and the vices, each group awaiting the approval of the soul. In the course of this discussion, Origen quotes Deuteronomy 30.15: *See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil*. Countless Christians have used this verse as Biblical proof that morality depends entirely upon our free choice of good or evil. But the particular success of Origen's exegesis is his addition of a third, morally neutral entity that does the actual choosing: *sicut scriptum est – 'Ecce posui ante faciem tuam vitam et mortem, ignem et aquam' – habet ergo in arbitrio suo anima, si velit, eligere vitam Christum, aut in mortem diabolum declinare.*<sup>270</sup>

Origen clearly believes that during its earthly life every soul possesses an absolutely free will and that it is the will of this soul – and that alone – that decides an individual's moral status. Moreover, this ability to choose between good and evil can never be lost. Even the blessedness of the elect is dependent upon a constant choice of the morally good. It is because the saints retain this capacity for

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<sup>267</sup> c.f. in *Lev. Hom.* 2.2: *constat animam esse, quae vel in carne, vel in spiritu seminat, et illam esse quae vel in peccatum ruere possit, vel convertia peccato. nam corpus sequela eius est ad quodcunque delegerit: et spiritus dux eius est ad virtutem, si eum sequi velit.*

<sup>268</sup> Sorabji (2000), p.315 has failed to notice the crucial point of this argument. He claims that Origen believed that there were two wills.

<sup>269</sup> c.f. similar arguments at *de Principiis* 2.8.4.

<sup>270</sup> c.f. *Commentary on Romans* 1.5 (PG 14, 850AB) for similar arguments.

moral choice that a second fall is possible. Jerome quotes various passages supposedly from the *de Principiis* in which Origen specifically refers to the possibility of a second fall.<sup>271</sup> There are even traces of the doctrine in Rufinus' sanitized version of the text. At *de Principiis* 2.3.3, we read that it is 'apparently possible' for the rational souls to fall again, precisely because they continue to possess free will: *possibile enim videtur ut rationabiles naturae, a quibus numquam aufertur liberi facultas arbitrii, possint iterum aliquibus motibus subiacere*. The crucial thesis of the *de Principiis* is the power and influence of the will as the cause of both our fall and our salvation. There is absolutely no suggestion that the freedom of the blessed is in any way qualified the second time around. Conversely, as it is possible for the elect to fall, so it is possible for the damned to be saved.<sup>272</sup> Even the devil remains capable of virtue: any day, he might repent of his sins and become the good angel he once was. The salvation of the damned is possible precisely because they still possess free will (*quod inest in ipsi liberi facultas arbitrii*) and are still able to 'desire better things' (*meliora cupientes*).<sup>273</sup>

This insistence upon the permanent possession of the liberty of indifference must be understood within the context of Origen's anti-Gnostic polemic. It is a deliberate and conscious refutation of the Gnostic theory of soul natures. St Jerome tells us that the doctrine of the possibility of the devil's salvation was developed as a direct response to Gnostic determinism: *assertit Candidus* (a well known Gnostic of the day) *diabolum pessimae esse naturae et quae salvari numquam possit. contra hoc recte Origenes respondit non eum periturae esse substantiae sed voluntate propria et posse salvari*.<sup>274</sup> Similarly, at *Commentary on St John* 20.24 (20), Origen points out to the Gnostic, Heracleon, that a sinful soul is of the same substance (οὐσία) as a virtuous soul and that the devil is therefore capable of virtue.<sup>275</sup> Origen's insistence upon the pre-carnate possession of the liberty of indifference is another integral element in this elaborate anti-Gnostic *weltanschauung*. At *de Principiis* 2.9.5-6, Origen insists that souls fell only because they wanted to fall and that their subsequent station in life is entirely dependent upon pre-carnate choice. To believe otherwise would be to endorse Gnostic determinism and would undermine both the justice of God and the autonomy of individual souls.

<sup>271</sup> Jerome *Letter to Avitus* 7.

<sup>272</sup> Denis (1884), pp. 344-5 is wrong to present the doctrine of universal salvation and the doctrine of the second fall as opposite and contradictory. They are two sides of the same coin, two possible manifestations of the permanent possession of the liberty of indifference.

<sup>273</sup> *de Principiis* 1.8.3-4. See also Jerome, *Letter to Avitus* 3.

<sup>274</sup> *Contra Rufinum* 2.19.

<sup>275</sup> πολλάκις δὲ εἶπομεν, ὅτι ἐὰν συγχωρηθῇ τοῦτο τὸ ἀδύνατον (λέγω δὲ τὸ εἶναι οὐσίας ἑτέρας καὶ ἀνεπίδεκτον τῶν κρείττονων τὸν διάβολον), περὶ μὲν ἐκείνου ἀπολογησόμεθα ὡς οὐδαμοῦ αἰτί

By itself, this belief in the permanent possession of the liberty of indifference is just an extreme version of the denial of ethical determinism. Ethical determinism, first defined by Aristotle, is the belief that a series of moral choices will eventually lead to the establishment of an unchangeable moral character.<sup>276</sup> Origen will not accept that an individual's moral choices and moral acts can have any permanent, irrevocable effect upon the essential nature (οὐσία) of his soul. That no one can become good or evil *by nature* is the corner stone of Origen's moral philosophy. Of course, every Christian was bound to accept the possibility of radical character change, the conversion of the worst possible sinners. Origen's daring is simply to apply the belief *sub specie aeternitatis*. While anyone could accept the conversion of St Paul, the conversion of the devil was much harder to countenance. It has been suggested, however, that this insistence on the permanent possession of the liberty of indifference implies merely the *possibility* of moral waywardness. The salvation of the devil and the damnation of Gabriel are possible futures. And, as Origen knew very well, a future can be possible even if it will definitely not happen.<sup>277</sup> Origen's doctrine of freedom could thus be excused as implying merely the *possibility* of a second fall or of universal salvation. However, in the *de Principiis* and other works there is a further argument which makes moral instability the essential characteristic of created beings. τρεπτότης is not merely a possibility; it is a certainty.<sup>278</sup>

### 8.3.

Origen's system lays great stress on the ontological gulf between creator and created, between that which exists eternally and that which came into existence at a particular time.<sup>279</sup> Moral instability is an ontological flaw inherent in all created nature insofar as it is created *ex nihilo*.<sup>280</sup> Only God, being eternal, is good by nature; created beings are only ever accidentally good. The crucial point is that an

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ου τῆς πονηρίας, τὸ δὲ ἔγκλημα τῷ αὐτὸν οὐσιώσαντικαὶ δημιουργήσαντι προσάψομεν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ πάντων ἀτοπώτατον (*Commentary on St John* 20.24 (20)).

<sup>276</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105a.

<sup>277</sup> For a discussion of Origen's familiarity with the Stoic doctrine of possibilities, see Rist (1981), pp.70-71 and Roberts (1970), pp.440ff. The doctrine is explicitly used at *Contra Celsum* 2.20, *Commentary on Genesis* (*Philocalia* 23.9) and *Commentary on Romans* (*Philocalia* 25.30-5) as a way of harmonizing the infallibility of God's foreknowledge with human freedom.

<sup>278</sup> Armand (1970), p.301 seems to have made the mistake of interpreting Origen's doctrine of τρεπτότης in a wholly positive light, as simply an assertion of freedom and a rejection of determinism.

<sup>279</sup> I cannot agree with Berchman (1984), p.155, who argues that the distinction between God and creation is "not permanent, but transitory . . . not predetermined ontologically, but determined wilfully." The arguments of section 8.3 will prove that this is certainly incorrect.

<sup>280</sup> The fact of *creatio ex nihilo* is crucial to Origen's system. Williams (1987), p.142 has missed a great deal when he writes that 'it is a moot point whether Origen would have readily described the rational creation as *ex nihilo*.' Otis (1958), p.102 and Bostock (1992), p.254 make the same mistake.

accident is not permanent. As Stead puts it, ‘anything which occurs can be reversed’.<sup>281</sup> The goodness of creatures, whenever achieved, is liable to be lost. This is an idea found throughout the *de Principiis*. At *de Principiis* 2.9.2, Origen explicitly states that the rational beings, because they were created from nothing, are *necessarily* subject to change and alteration. At *de Principiis* 4.4.4, we read that the very fact of creation makes all intellectual nature changeable and convertible. The same is said at *de Principiis* 1.2.10. Rist, discussing Augustine, describes the “weakness (which) depends on the element of non-being, otherness, which is necessarily inherent in anything created *ex nihilo*.”<sup>282</sup> These remarks apply equally well to Origen: they are simply a theological elaboration of a traditional philosophical maxim, i.e. the weakness of non-being. Lyman suggests that this means that the fall of souls was an inevitable expression of their created nature.<sup>283</sup> This is exactly Origen’s claim at *de Principiis* 1.2.4. God foresaw that souls would fall, precisely because their goodness is accidental and not essential.<sup>284</sup> An interesting discussion of this subject is *Commentary on St Matthew* (Frag. 141).<sup>285</sup> Commenting on Matthew 7.11 – *you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children* – Origen wonders why Christ refers to the disciples as ‘evil’. The answer is that they possess that dangerous waywardness that characterizes all human nature. There is no guarantee of their future virtue: προαίρεσις is fickle and unpredictable. Only the Son of God (in both his humanity and his divinity) is morally ἀτρεπτος: πῶς δὲ τοὺς μαθητὰς πονηροὺς ἐκάλεσεν; εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἡκολούθουν ἐκ προαιρέσεως, ἀλλ’ εἶχον τὸ τρεπτὸν τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου. μόνον δὲ ἀτρεπτος ἦν καὶ θεότητι καὶ ἀνθρωπότητι ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ υἱός.

At *Commentary on St John* (Frag. 77), Origen offers an allegorical interpretation of the sickness of Lazarus that illustrates exactly the same point. It is because of the changeability of human morality that those who were once ‘friends’ of Jesus can sicken and die (i.e. turn to sin).<sup>286</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Numbers*, Origen contrasts God and man on precisely the same grounds: *cum utique homines non faciant, quae dicunt, et vitio humanae fragilitatis in his non permaneant, quae loquitur; mutabilis enim est homo, immutabilis vero Deus*. Otis is right to stress the importance of moral rigorism in Origen’s

<sup>281</sup> Stead (1983), p.249. Origen is making explicit use of Aristotle’s notion of the accidental.

<sup>282</sup> Rist (1974), p.507.

<sup>283</sup> Lyman (1993), p.61.

<sup>284</sup> This important passage is ignored by Lyman.

<sup>285</sup> Referred to by Stead (1983), p.249, but not discussed.

<sup>286</sup> ἐπεὶ δὲ τρεπτὴ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις, καὶ ἀσθενῆσαι ποτὲ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ φίλος· ἀσθενῆσαι δ’ ἂν ὅτε μὴ πάρεστιν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ οὐ μόνον ἀσθενῆσαι ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀποθάνει. Passage also referred to, but not discussed, by Stead (1983), p.249.



system.<sup>287</sup> The tendency to lapse is a characteristic of the human condition; even the saints must be vigilant and constantly aware of the tempter's guile.<sup>288</sup> St Peter's denial of Christ and the disciples' fear at the Last Supper as to the identity of the traitor become for Origen perfect Biblical proof of this universal human weakness.<sup>289</sup>

At *Commentary on Romans* 5.10, in a famous and much disputed passage, Rufinus reports the views of an anonymous group of 'heretics' concerning the possibility of a second fall. The heretics begin their argument by claiming that it is absurd to imagine the life of the elect as one of stagnation, in which nothing (good or bad) is done.<sup>290</sup> The rational souls are by nature active and must always be making some kind of moral choice, good or evil. Various scholars, notably Chadwick, have argued that the views ascribed to the anonymous heretics are the views of Origen himself.<sup>291</sup> They understand the passage as Rufinus' valiant attempt to save his master from the slur of heresy by putting suspect views into the mouths of others. This seems to me very likely. There are two passages in the *de Principiis* where Origen explicitly argues that rational souls cannot be idle or inactive: they must either be choosing virtue or choosing vice.<sup>292</sup> And, although Rufinus felt it prudent to omit it, the arguments of *Commentary on Romans* 5.10 allow us to deduce the original implication of this claim, namely the denial of the security of the elect. Once again, we see how rational beings are by their very nature changeable and wayward. τρεπτότης is an inescapable ontological fact. There is no moral security. Jerome's *Letter to Pammachius and Oceanus* may be a bitter polemical diatribe, but its attack on the Origenist system is basically correct.<sup>293</sup> Gabriel can become Caiaphas and Judas can become St Peter

<sup>287</sup> Otis (1958), p.103.

<sup>288</sup> See also Roldanus (1968), p.337, who speaks of "l'ambiguïté constante de pénitence et d'humilité qui doit être propre au pneumatique."

<sup>289</sup> *Commentary Series on St Matthew* 81 and 88 and *Commentary on St John* 32.18-19 (11-12). See especially 32.19 (12), where Origen writes that it is the very possession of free will (προαίρεσις) that makes the continued loyalty of the disciples uncertain: ἐμμένηντο γάρ, οἶμαι, ἄνθρωποι ὄντες, ὅτι τρεπτή ἐστὶν ἡ προαίρεσις . . . καὶ ἐπιδεχόμενὴ τὸ ἐναντία θέλειν οἷς πρότερον προέθετο.

<sup>290</sup> *nunquid potest saeculum esse aliquod in futuro ubi neque boni neque mali agitur, sed stupeant res, et aneant profunda silentia? absurdum hoc videri asserunt.*

<sup>291</sup> Chadwick (1947), p.41.

<sup>292</sup> *certum est quia nullum animal omnimodi otiosum atque immobile esse potest, sed omni genere moveri et agere semper et velle aliquid gesit. multo ergo magis rationabile animal, id est hominis naturam necesse est semper movere vel agere (de Principiis 2.11.1). liberi namque arbitrii semper est anima, etiam in corpore hoc, etiam cum extra corpus est; id est libertas arbitrii vel ad bona semper vel ad mala movetur, nec umquam rationabilis sensus, id est mens vel anima, sine motu aliquo esse vel bono vel malo potest (de Principiis 3.3.5).*

<sup>293</sup> Jerome *Letter* 209, chapter 7.

because, being creatures, neither can be certain of his future moral choices. Origen's rational souls are caught in an everlasting moral predicament.<sup>294</sup>

#### 8.4.1.

In contrast to the eternal *τρεπτότης* of created nature, Origen insists that God is secure in his unchanging and unchangeable goodness. An understanding of this aspect of Origen's theology is crucial to the present study, insofar as it reveals Origen's fear of freedom and his recognition of the dangers involved in moral choice. It is very important to recognize that Origen's God is good by nature and not by will. Origen's system is not voluntarist in the sense suggested by Lyman.<sup>295</sup>

Lyman argues that Origen's God is free to act solely and wholly as his will dictates. She devotes a whole chapter of her book to discussing the freedom of God, laying particular emphasis on the generation of the Son and the creation of the world.<sup>296</sup> But I would argue that the theology of the *de Principiis* is much more similar to contemporary pagan philosophy, especially that of the *Enneads*, than to traditional Christian voluntarism.<sup>297</sup> For example, Origen believes that the Son exists first and foremost for the fullness and perfection of the Godhead: without the Son, the Father would be *ἄλογος* and *ἄσοφος*.<sup>298</sup> This Trinitarian paradigm makes the existence of the Son both necessary and eternal: he is not merely the Father's instrument *ad extra*, whom he creates when he has decided to create the world.<sup>299</sup> Lyman stresses Origen's various references to the will of the Father in his discussions of the generation of the Son (*de Principiis* 1.2.2, 1.2.6, 2.6.9, 4.4.1). But we must be very careful how we interpret these references. There is no suggestion that the Father could have chosen *not* to generate the Son. Origen is not speaking here of a *γυμνός βούλησις*,<sup>300</sup> of a freedom to will or not to will. For Origen, the will of the Father is intimately linked to intellect,<sup>301</sup> which is his very essence.<sup>302</sup> Surely we

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<sup>294</sup> Gregg and Groh (1981), p.180.

<sup>295</sup> Lyman (1992), pp. 39-81.

<sup>296</sup> Lyman (1983), pp. 47-58.

<sup>297</sup> See Armstrong (1992), p.122: "I do not think that Origen would have found much to quarrel with in the great treatise *Free Will and the Will of the One*", i.e. *Ennead* 6.8.

<sup>298</sup> See especially *de Principiis* 4.4.1; *Commentary on Ephesians* (Frag 10) and *Commentary on St John* 2.19 (13). For a full discussion of this, see chapter 1, sections 3.1-3.3. Lebreton (1925), pp.15-19, Otis (1958) p.104 and Pollard (1955), p.287 make the mistake of seeing the Son's existence as purely instrumental or economic.

<sup>299</sup> This was the Apologist paradigm (Scheffczyk (1970), pp.57-60), which Origen deliberately and consciously rejected. For a full discussion of this, see chapter 1, sections 1.2-1.3.

<sup>300</sup> On this term, see Armstrong (1982), p.403.

<sup>301</sup> See *de Principiis* 1.2.6. On this, see Lyman (1994), p.53.

<sup>302</sup> See *de Principiis* 1.1.6.

have here the Plotinian doctrine of the absolute congruence of will and nature.<sup>303</sup> There is no duality and no distinction between God's will and God's nature and hence no scope for real choice. For both Origen and Plotinus, the will of God is not a free choice between possible alternatives, but the inevitable expression of an unchanging and unchangeable nature.

Similarly, the creation of souls, as described in the *de Principiis*, is organic and not voluntarist.<sup>304</sup> The goodness of God necessitates creation: *causa creandi bonitas Dei* (*de Principiis* 2.9.6; 4.4.7). It is extremely important that Origen believed this first creation to have been 'equal and alike', simply a myriad of rational souls.<sup>305</sup> This was the only possible kind of creation: there is no scope here for creatorial choice.<sup>306</sup> Origen's insistence that the second creation, the creation of the physical universe, was the direct response to the virtues and vices of individual souls, is an obvious rejection of the hegemony of creatorial will.<sup>307</sup> It is the creatures, not the creator, who decide the nature of the world.<sup>308</sup> To explain the varied creation in terms of the will of the creator would be to endorse Gnostic determinism, to admit that God was unfair and arbitrary in his dealings with men. In Origen's system, no one can be allowed to complain that he was born a man and not an angel, a barbarian and not a Greek: our lot in life is the direct result of freely chosen pre-carnate acts (*de Principiis* 2.9.3-8).<sup>309</sup> Finally, Origen's belief that everything in the world has a rational explanation, a reason and a purpose which man will eventually understand, strikes at the very heart of the Biblical description of God. Origen's God is not free to create simply as his will dictates: his acts are bound by the dictates of reason.<sup>310</sup>

#### 8.4.2.

<sup>303</sup> On Plotinus' rejection of the duality of will (βούλησις) and nature (οὐσία), see Armstrong (1982), pp. 403-4.

<sup>304</sup> So Meredith (1985), p.393.

<sup>305</sup> See *de Principiis* 1.5.3 and 2.9.6. On this, see Scott (1991), p.153

<sup>306</sup> *hic cum in principio crearet ea, quae creare voluit, id est rationabiles naturas, nullam habuit aliam creandi causam nisi se ipsum, id est bonitatem suam. quia ergo eorum quae creanda erant, ipse extitit causa, in quo neque varietas aliqua neque permutatio neque impossibilitas inerant, aequales creavit omnes ac similes quas creavit, quippe cum nulla ei causa varietatis ac diversitatis existeret* (*de Principiis* 2.9.6). Note that Origen still makes use of the language of willing, but, as with the generation of the Son, there is no suggestion of a choice between possible alternatives. There could only ever have been one kind of creation.

<sup>307</sup> Meredith (1985), p.394 is wrong to highlight Origen's reference to the *voluntas creatoris* at *de Principiis* 1.5.3. This is the Gnostic argument which Origen proceeds to demolish. For a mythological elaboration of the traditional view of the sovereignty of the creatorial will, the reader is referred to C.S. Lewis *The Magician's Nephew*, chapter 9. Which of the animals become talking beasts? Simply those whom Aslan chooses.

<sup>308</sup> Williams (1987), p.141: "the world we inhabit as material beings is not 'created' by God: it is made, or at least conditioned, by the choices of his creatures."

<sup>309</sup> On this, see Scott (1991), pp.134-7.

From this brief survey of Origen's theology, it must be clear that he did not espouse Christian voluntarism. Origen's God is not free in the sense of choosing between possible alternatives. His acts are not arbitrary and unpredictable. They are the inevitable expression of a good and rational nature. God cannot act otherwise than he does. Specifically, he cannot be evil or irrational. This is the clear message of the *Contra Celsum*. At *Contra Celsum* 3.70 Celsus, in the guise of the Jew, argues that God can do everything and that it must therefore be his will and not his nature that is the guarantee of his goodness.<sup>311</sup> Origen replies that God cannot do what is evil. If he could, he would cease to be God, who is by very definition good and wise. Once again, we see that it is the nature of God that dictates, even necessitates, his acts. As sugar cannot make anything bitter and light cannot make anything dark, so God can do nothing that is evil: ἡμεῖς δὲ φαμεν ὅτι, ὥσπερ οὐ δύναται τὸ πεφυκὸς γλυκαίνειν τῷ γλυκῷ τυγχάνειν πικράζειν παρὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ μόνην αἰτίαν, οὐδὲ τὸ πεφυκὸς φωτίζειν τῷ εἶναι φῶς σκοτίζειν, οὕτως οὐδ' ὁ θεὸς δύναται ἀδικεῖν· ἐναντίον γάρ ἐστιν αὐτοῦ τῇ θειότητι καὶ τῇ κατ' αὐτὴν πάσῃ δυνάμει ἡ τοῦ ἀδικεῖν δύναμις. Origen's views are in fact the same as those as Celsus, as reported at *Contra Celsum* 5.14: ἀλλ' οὐτι γὰρ τὰ αἰσχρὰ ὁ θεὸς δύναται οὐδὲ τὰ παρὰ φύσιν βούλεται.<sup>312</sup>

Origen concludes that the inability to choose evil is proof of God's omnipotence. Like Augustine, Origen believes that humans are less free than God and less powerful because they are unable not to choose sin: εἰ δὲ τι τῶν ὄντων δύναται ἀδικεῖν τῷ καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἀδικεῖν πεφυκέναι, δύναται ἀδικεῖν οὐκ ἔχον ἐν τῇ φύσει τὸ μηδαμῶς δύνασθαι ἀδικεῖν (*Contra Celsum* 3.70).<sup>313</sup> For Origen, ultimate freedom and ultimate power is not the liberty of indifference. The ability, or rather the need, to choose between good and evil is the sorry lot of created nature. Only the eternal God is exempt. His goodness is the goodness of an unchanging and unchangeable nature.<sup>314</sup> The goodness of creatures is (precariously) dependent upon will.

<sup>310</sup> See section 3.2.

<sup>311</sup> Celsus is echoing the opinions of Philo (e.g. *Special Laws* 4.87). See Dihle (1987), p.90: "Philo did not want to restrict the boundless power of his God."

<sup>312</sup> Passage referred to by Armstrong (1992), p.402. c.f. *Contra Celsum* 5.23: if God did anything shameful, he would cease to be God. In the next chapter, Origen makes the even stronger claim that God cannot even *want* what is evil. This view can be compared with that of Porphyry: although God is able to *want* what is evil, he will always be thwarted (Grant (1952), p.131).

<sup>313</sup> On this, see Denis (1884), p.253: for Origen, the freedom of God is the freedom not to sin.

<sup>314</sup> See *Commentary on St John* 2.17 (11): only God is truly immortal, because only he possesses an unchanging and unalterable life (τὴν ἀτρέπτου πάντη καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον ζωὴν).

At *Contra Celsum* 5.21, Origen similarly claims that God is unchangeable (ἄτρεπτον) precisely because he lacks free will (ἐφ' ἡμῖν). The context of these remarks is a discussion of the Stoic theory of world cycles, according to which everything that happens has been repeated and will be repeated eternally. Origen rejects the theory on the grounds that the consequences of human freedom can never be predicted because they are, by very definition, contingent. What is particularly important about this passage is the contrast between the fickleness of men and the constancy of God. It is interesting to compare Priscillian's denial of world cycles with that of Origen. The argument of the former hinges on the fact that the will of *God* is free and hence unpredictable.<sup>315</sup>

8.5.

It is because of his peculiar understanding of the freedom of the will that Origen cannot allow Christ to possess an ordinary human soul and thereby enjoy ordinary human freedom. To do so would be to admit that Christ was morally wayward, constantly liable to lapse into sin. In Origen's system, to be *capax mali* made it worryingly likely, even inevitable, that one would at some point be *malus*. It was for this reason that Origen deemed it necessary to distinguish, in Christ, sinlessness *tout court* and the inability to sin.<sup>316</sup> It was not enough for Origen to believe that Christ was simply without sin: he had to be unable to sin. Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, must be good by nature and not simply by will. In order to guarantee the goodness of Christ, Origen was obliged to make him *incapax mali*.

Although it was philosophically necessary for Origen to believe that Christ assumed a human soul as well as a human body, he recognized the immense difficulties involved. The arguments of *de Principiis* 2.6.5-7 are Origen's attempt at a solution, his response to the objection that if Christ assumed a human soul he must be *capax mali*. In dealing with this objection, Origen must show how Christ's soul achieved the divine quality of impeccability. It will emerge, however, that the only way to do this was to make Christ's soul *sui generis*, entirely different from every other soul. Origen's doctrine of the soul of Christ thus forms an obvious anomaly in his philosophical system. It is the unique biography of a unique soul.

9.1.

<sup>315</sup> For Priscillian, see Dihle (1982), p.164.

<sup>316</sup> In Gesché's useful terminology, to distinguish *impeccance* from *impeccabilité* (Gesché (1962), p.200). Origen's follower, Didymus the Blind similarly distinguished *impeccabilitas* from *impeccantia de facto* (Gesché (1962), pp.200-202; Grillmeier (1975), pp.274-5; Le Boulluec (1985), p.225), but unlike Origen concluded that it was theoretically possible for Christ to sin. Both Grillmeier and Gesché make the mistake of conflating Origen's Christology with that of Didymus, i.e. they ignore the crucial fact that Origen's Christ was *unable* to sin.

At its creation, the soul of Christ was of exactly the same nature and in exactly the same position as every other soul. Like them, it participated in the Logos (this was the life intended by God when he first created the souls)<sup>317</sup> and like them, it possessed the liberty of indifference (equally able to choose either virtue or vice). But while every other soul abused the gift of free will and fell from bliss, this one soul constantly chose virtue.<sup>318</sup> Origen then claims, in an argument that seems to owe a very great deal to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that by this long series of moral choices a habit or nature developed.<sup>319</sup> This soul gradually began to lose its ability to choose evil and eventually became good by nature, i.e. *incapax mali*.<sup>320</sup> It lost forever all susceptibility to change and alteration and thus achieved a moral nature that was safely ἀτρεπτος.

The very nature and essence of this soul has been permanently and irrevocably changed by a series of freely willed moral acts. Origen illustrates this theory with the famous image of an iron thrust into a fire.<sup>321</sup> At first, the iron is able to receive both coldness and heat, but having remained for a sufficiently long time in the fire it loses its ability to receive coldness; finally, the iron in some sense becomes the fire. The iron represents the soul of Christ and the fire represents the Logos, in which all souls originally participated. At first, the soul of Christ is able to choose either good or evil, but by the constant choice of the former it comes to lose its ability to choose evil; finally, the soul becomes the Logos.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> *de Principiis* 2.6.3.

<sup>318</sup> *verum cum pro liberi arbitrii facultate varietas unumquemque ac diversitas habuisset animorum, ut alius ardentiore, alius tenuiore et exiliore erga auctorem suum teneretur, illa anima, de qua dixit Iesus quia 'nemo aufert a me animam meam', ab initio creaturae et deinceps inseparabiliter ei atque indissociabiliter inhaerens . . . (de Principiis 2.6.3).*

<sup>319</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105a. Let it be remembered that the possibility of the development of this kind of moral 'habit' is elsewhere expressly denied by Origen (section 8.2).

<sup>320</sup> *haec anima, quae Christi est, ita elegit diligere iustitiam, ut pro immensitate dilectionis inconvertibiliter ei atque inseparabiliter inhaeret, ita ut propositi firmitas et affectus immensitas et dilectionis inextinguibilis calor omnem sensum conversionis atque immutationis abscideret, ut quod in arbitrio erat positum, longi usus affectu iam verum sit in naturam (de Principiis 2.6.5).* Origen repeats this vitally important point in his summary of the *de Principiis*: *ita et fuisset quidem in Christi humana et rationalis anima credenda est, et nullum sensum vel possibilitatem eam putandum est habuisse peccati. sola omnium animarum peccati incapax fuit (de Principiis 4.4.4).*

<sup>321</sup> *de Principiis* 2.6.6.

<sup>322</sup> It must be emphasized that this union is founded upon the soul's love for the Logos (*de Principiis* 2.6.3). Dewart (1976), p. 286-7 makes the mistake of intellectualizing the union: he explains it as a kind of Plotinian union of contemplation. Refoulé (1961), p.264 is correct when he writes that "Origène mettait l'accent sur l'amour et sur la volonté."

It is very important that Origen believes that this soul was originally *capax mali* and that its anointing as the Messiah was the reward for freely chosen virtue.<sup>323</sup> The rigours of his anti-Gnostic polemic force Origen to suppress any implication of divine election. This soul chose God; not vice-versa. This idea is most clearly stated at *de Principiis* 2.6.4: *ut non fortuita aut cum acceptione personae animae eius assumptio, sed virtutum suarum ei delecta . . . delectionis igitur merito ungitur oleo laetitiae (Psalm 45.7), id est anima cum verbo Dei Christus*. The expression *fortuita aut cum personae acceptione* occurs throughout Origen's oeuvre. It is his usual short-hand for Gnostic determinism. To refute this, Origen must argue that the rank and rôle of every soul is the reward or punishment for freely chosen moral acts. There is thus no partiality on the part of God. Gabriel was not created as Gabriel nor was he randomly chosen to be Gabriel. His arch-angelic rank was earned and deserved.<sup>324</sup> Similarly, the assumption by God of the soul of Christ was not an arbitrary divine decision, but the direct reward for freely chosen moral acts. At *Commentary on Romans* 2 (*Philocalia* 25.2), in a passage devoted to the refutation of determinism, Origen argues that it was because of its unique virtue that this soul became the 'image of the image', i.e. Christ. The crucial point, as Lyman says, is that its virtue was foreknown but not predetermined.<sup>325</sup> At *Contra Celsum* 6.48, Origen is similarly keen to stress the voluntary origins of the hypostatic union: the soul of Jesus clings to the Logos because of its virtue.<sup>326</sup>

Of course a major problem with this model is that the Incarnation and hence the Redemption become entirely dependent upon the (originally) entirely free will of a created being. God does not take the initiative, but awaits the decision of his creature. Although the goodness of the soul of Christ was eternally foreknown, it was not guaranteed. Indeed, given Origen's peculiarly extreme version of the free will problem, it was just as likely that this soul would have chosen evil. And without a sufficiently virtuous soul to perform the vital rôle of intermediary, the Incarnation – the assumption by God of a human body – would have been impossible. Origen's insistence on an entirely meritocratic universe has led him into very dangerous waters. It is a creature and not the creator who controls and dictates the whole course of sacred history.<sup>327</sup>

<sup>323</sup> In some ways, Origen's Christology is a kind of pre-carnate Adoptionism. Geshé (1959), p.143 tells us that after the condemnation of the Adoptionist Paul of Samosata, Origen's views on the soul of Christ began to arouse suspicion and were tacitly dropped by his followers.

<sup>324</sup> *de Principiis* 1.5.3.

<sup>325</sup> For quotations and a discussion, see Lyman (1994), p.57.

<sup>326</sup> Passage quoted in Crouzel (1956), p.230.

<sup>327</sup> Very few scholars seem to have noticed this worrying aspect of Origen's Christology. Stead (1994), p.190 and Bigg (1886), p.337 are notable exceptions. Even Lyman, who is so keen to stress the voluntarist aspects of Origen's system, has failed to notice this particular point.

## 9.2.

There is some disagreement amongst scholars as to what Origen actually means by claiming that the soul of Christ has become the Logos. According to de Faye and Crouzel, he means a metaphysical transformation.<sup>328</sup> According to Refoulé, Lyman and Dewart, Origen believed that Christ's soul retained its human characteristics, and that the 'union' was no more than an agreement of will.<sup>329</sup>

Chadwick tells us that the image used by Origen was Stoic in origin.<sup>330</sup> For the Stoics, an iron placed in a fire was an example of *μίξις*, in which two dry bodies unite while retaining their distinctive characteristics.<sup>331</sup> But Origen seems to believe that a lump of iron in a furnace will eventually assume the characteristics of the fire that surrounds it. The time will come when the iron will no longer act like iron, but like fire: *totam ignem effectam dicimus, quia nec aliud in ea nisi ignis cernitur; sed et si qui contingere atque adtrectare temptaverit, non ferri sed ignis sentiet (de Principiis 2.6.6).*

The iron has not ceased to exist; it is still a tangible lump of metal. To speak, with de Faye, of a metaphysical transformation is not entirely correct. In Origen's psychology, although souls come to be they cannot pass away. The fact that Origen adds the image of a vase containing ointment helps to clarify his position.<sup>332</sup> Clearly the vase (Christ's human soul) continues to exist as a separate, concrete entity, but this is not the point of the image. The point of the image is that the jar is so permeated by the ointment (the Logos) that it too gives off a scent, i.e. it has assumed the *ἐνέργεια* of the ointment.<sup>333</sup>

Origen's Christology is thus proto-Monophysite. Like Origen, the Monophysites were keen to assert the continued existence of Christ's humanity with the crucial proviso that it no longer acted in any recognizably human way. Severus of Antioch, likening Christ's human nature to an ember in the fire, insists that the wood has not ceased to be wood, but that it 'does what is proper to fire, namely to shine

<sup>328</sup> de Faye (1923) III, p.134-5: "L'union est si vraiment organique que la nature d'homme qui est en Jesus-Christ subit une transformation . . . il semble alors que la psyche de Jesus se confonde et s'identifie avec le Logos." Crouzel (1956), p. 137: the union is 'une veritable transformation physique.'

<sup>329</sup> Refoulé (1961), p.263: "Il ne semble pas qu'Origène envisage cette unité comme, a rigoureusement parler, ontique . . . Autrement dit, l'union entre le Christ et le Verbe doit être en definitive caracterisée de moral." Lyman (1993), p.75 writes that "the union is not . . . wholly metaphysical . . . since the distinction of human and divine remains." Dewart (1956) devotes a whole chapter of his article – "Moral Union in Christology before Nestorius" – to Origen's doctrine of the soul of Christ.

<sup>330</sup> Chadwick (1951), p.161.

<sup>331</sup> See *SVF* II, p.153: *μίξιν δ' εἶναι δύο ἢ καὶ πλειόνων σωμάτων ἀντιπαρέκτασιν δι' ὅλων, ὑπομενουσῶν τῶν συμφυῶν περὶ αὐτὰ ποιότητων, ὥς ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρὸς ἔχει καὶ τοῦ πεπυρακτωμένου σιδήρου, ἐπὶ τούτων γὰρ δι' ὅλων γίνεσθαι τῶν σωμάτων τὴν ἀντιπαρέκτασιν.* Passage cited in Chadwick (1951), pp.160-61. See Heine (1998), pp.75-76 for a discussion of *μίξις*.

<sup>332</sup> *de Principiis* 2.6.6.

<sup>333</sup> *ἐνέργεια* (*inoperatio*) = 'operation' is a technical Aristotelian term meaning the proper or natural function/purpose of a particular thing.



and to burn.<sup>334</sup> Discussing this passage, Chesnut concludes that the image illustrates how Christ's humanity has become the ἐνέργεια of his divinity. This is exactly Origen's position. As he explicitly states, the soul of Christ has become God in all its acts, feelings and thoughts.<sup>335</sup> In answer to Wiles' question,<sup>336</sup> it is the Logos which performs the reasoning and guiding function and which directs and dictates the whole of the Saviour's life. Once it has performed the task of allowing the divine to mingle with a body, the soul of Christ has no active rôle to play. His humanity, if it exists at all, has become a mere puppet used by the Logos.<sup>337</sup> Origen's image of the soul of Christ as the shadow of the Logos (*de Principiis* 2.6.7) is the perfect illustration of his views on the subordination of the Saviour's humanity. Similarly, at *Contra Celsum* 1.70, Origen compares the way that the Logos used Christ's humanity to the way Apollo used the priestess at Delphi: it is simply the tool through which the epiphany is effected.

### 9.3.

Various commentators, both ancient and modern, have objected to Origen's doctrine of the soul of Christ that it destroys the uniqueness of the Incarnation. They argue that before the fall every soul participated in the Logos and will do so again, that the union between Christ and the Logos is no more than and no different from a *unio mystica*. Other scholars highlight the didactic and exhortative purpose behind Origen's doctrine of the soul of Christ. Lyman, for example, argues that the soul of Christ was primarily intended to provide a moral paradigm and an imitable pattern of behaviour for all believers: we should follow its excellent example and, by constantly choosing the good, achieve a similar union with the Logos.<sup>338</sup> Indeed, the consensus of scholarly opinion is to see the journey of this soul from τρεπτός to ἀτρεπτος virtue as providing an imitable pattern of behaviour for other souls. Harl and Crouzel agree that this soul is held up as a moral example for future Christians.<sup>339</sup> Williams, basing himself on Simonetti, argues that the soul of Christ provides comforting assurance that Origen did in fact believe in the possibility of moral security, that the problem of τρεπτότης was not an eternal problem;<sup>340</sup> Nemeshegyi says the same.<sup>341</sup> Refoulé and Blocher see the final status of the soul of Christ

<sup>334</sup> *Homily* 48. Quoted and discussed by Chesnut (1976), pp.32-3.

<sup>335</sup> *omne quod agit, quod sensit, quod intelligit, deus est (de Principiis 2.6.6).*

<sup>336</sup> Wiles (1965), p.142.

<sup>337</sup> Kelly (1977), p.157.

<sup>338</sup> Lyman (1993), pp.75-76.

<sup>339</sup> Harl (1957), p.117 and Crouzel (1956), p.135.

<sup>340</sup> Williams (1981), p.133.

<sup>341</sup> Nemeshegyi (1960), p.219.

as the precursor of our own deification.<sup>342</sup> Le Boulluec, Denis and Roldanus all argue for the protreptic value of the Saviour's human soul.<sup>343</sup> But it seems to me that the subject is far more complicated than this.

Origen insists that the union between the soul of Christ and the Logos is very different from the kind of participation that an ordinary soul can enjoy. At *de Principiis* 2.6.5-6 Origen quotes one of his favourite Old Testament passages – *God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows* (Psalm 45.7) – and draws particular attention to the last three words: this proves that the status of the soul of Christ far surpasses that of the prophets and apostles. At 4.4.4, the same verse is used, with a similar interpretation. Origen argues that the Logos was not 'in' the soul of Christ in the same way as it was 'in' the souls of, for example, Peter and Paul. This is because every soul, except the soul of Christ, has committed at least one sin. Of course this belief makes particular sense within the context of Origen's theory of the fall of souls: men would not even exist (as men) unless they had sinned.<sup>344</sup> The soul of Christ is the only soul that has never committed a sin and this allows it to enjoy a unique union with the Logos. When, at 4.4.4, Origen urges us to imitate Christ and partake of the divine nature, he adds the all important proviso – *only as far as it is possible (in quantum fieri potest)*. At *de Principiis* 2.6.6, Origen explicitly distinguishes the soul of Christ from the souls of ordinary men and women on the grounds that only the soul of Christ enjoys an unchanging and unchangeable union with the Logos. The soul of Christ is the jar containing the ointment (the Logos); we merely share in it, receive its perfume, more or less, depending on our proximity. The distinction is between those who merely 'participate' (*participant*) in the Logos and that which actually contains it. Ordinary souls move nearer or further from the perfume, relative to their spiritual development; the soul of Christ is permanently soaked in it.

At most, we can hope to return to our former glory, the blessed state from which we fell, and once again participate in the Logos.<sup>345</sup> The soul of Christ, however, has passed far beyond this first stage. It no longer simply 'participates' in the Logos. It has actually become the Logos. Many scholars have missed the crucially important point that the final status of the soul of Christ is the result of a very long

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<sup>342</sup> Refoulé (1961), p.263: "Il reste pourtant qu'il n'a pu concevoir l'union de l'âme préexistente du Christ au Verbe divin que sur le type de union mystique" and p.264: "son union mystique au Verbe se présente nécessairement alors comme le prototype de la nôtre." Blocher (1986), p.101.

<sup>343</sup> Le Boulluec (1985), p.223, Denis (1884), p.367 and Roldanus (1968), pp.219, 258 and 274.

<sup>344</sup> On this point, see Williams (1981), pp.132-3. He correctly concludes that "We cannot choose as Christ has chosen." The reader is also referred to *Commentary on Romans* 3.8 (PG14, 949A-950C) where Origen stresses the uniqueness of the soul of Christ.

process. It is a popular misconception that this soul was always united with the Logos and was always Christ.<sup>346</sup> This is certainly not Origen's opinion: his is a dynamic Christology. At *de Principiis* 2.6.5-6, Origen explicitly argues that the soul's anointing as the Messiah was the result of a process that took place over a long period of time. The soul had to prove that its love was steadfast and its virtue constant by a long series of moral choices. At first, it was exactly like any other soul; it took time for it to reach the next stage and to become good by nature.<sup>347</sup> A habit cannot develop over-night. A lump of iron placed in a fire does not *immediately* become the fire; it takes time for it to lose its original qualities. So, too, this soul, cleaving to the Logos, does not *immediately* become God; it takes time for it to lose its original τρεπτότης. It is only when it has become good by nature that this soul can become the Messiah. Similar arguments are used at *Commentary on St. John* 1.28 (30), where Origen makes the point that this soul was not always the Messiah. It had to prove itself worthy of this supreme honour by loving justice and hating injustice (Psalm 45.7) *for a sufficiently long period of time*. Origen compares this temporal development with the Logos' eternal status as King. Christ's status as King belongs to his divine nature; his status as Messiah is earned, gradually, over time and is an attribute of his humanity, specifically of his human soul:

οὐκ ὄντα βασιλέα, ὕστερον βασιλέα γεγονέναι διὰ τὸ ἡγαπηκέναι δικαιοσύνην.

It cannot therefore be claimed that Origen's doctrine of the soul of Christ destroys the uniqueness of the Incarnation and that it reduces it to the kind of participation enjoyed by any Christian soul. It is not the case, as so many scholars have argued, that the soul of Christ simply remained in the Logos, while every other soul fell. There was a crucially important development in the nature of this soul that renders it entirely different from any other soul. It has passed far beyond the stage of mere participation in the Logos: it has actually become the Logos. I cannot accept the conclusions of Refoulé and the others that Origen explains the Christological union in terms of a *unio mystica*. The kind of union enjoyed by mystics is entirely different from the kind of union enjoyed by the soul of Christ. In his

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<sup>345</sup> Origen insists that the 'end is like the beginning' (*de Principiis* 1.6.2).

<sup>346</sup> So, for example, Williams (1987), p.145, Dewart (1976), p.284, Crouzel (1989), pp.192-3, Harl (1957), p.116 and Roldanus (1968), p.219.

<sup>347</sup> Gesché (1962), p.201 is wrong when he says: "pour le grand Alexandrin, l'âme de Jesus, préexistente comme toutes les autres âmes humaines, est *indéfectiblement* restée fidèle à Dieu, *dès le moment de sa création*" (my emphasis). Gesché has missed the crucial point that, at first, this soul was exactly like other souls, equally able to choose good or evil: it was only at a much later stage that its virtue and faithfulness became 'indéfectible'.

many discussions of mystical union, Origen never claims that the soul of the mystic becomes God.<sup>348</sup> He is always keen to stress the ontological gulf between the creator and the created.<sup>349</sup> Where he does talk of divinization, he is not to be taken literally.<sup>350</sup>

#### 9.4.

It is hard to see therefore how Origen's doctrine of the soul of Christ can have any kind of moral or protreptic value. It is rather the case that the development of this soul from wayward freedom to perfect impeccability is simply a necessary aside to ensure the sinlessness of the Saviour, within the peculiar context of the *de Principiis*. It is a theory that Origen was forced to develop in answer to the objection anticipated at *de Principiis* 2.6.5. It should not be understood as a general theory applicable to the souls of ordinary men and women. The success story of this one soul is not intended to inspire us with the hope of our own future perfection and the possibility of our own future impeccability. The belief that it is possible to become good by nature and unable to sin is a blatant contradiction of the two fundamental theses of the *de Principiis*. (1) As we have seen, Origen's moral philosophy is characterized by the vehement rejection of ethical determinism in favour of the permanent possession of the liberty of indifference. Anti-Gnostic fervour leads Origen to argue that the most hardened sinners and the most virtuous saints are always capable of an abrupt and drastic character change. (2) Throughout the *de Principiis*, Origen emphasizes the ontological distinction between the eternal Creator and the souls who are created *ex nihilo*. Only God, being eternal, is good by nature. Created beings can only ever be accidentally good; they remain constantly liable to relapse into sin.

Wiles has argued that the Christologies of the Early Church were almost entirely subjected to the dictates of soteriology.<sup>351</sup> The nature of the Redeemer provided a salvific blue-print: what happened to Christ will happen to us. The orthodox theologians of the fourth century, for example, inspired hope of our own future moral stability precisely by describing a Saviour who was ἀτρεπτος and *incapax mali*. If, in Christ, the weak and wayward human will has been replaced by a sure and steadfast will to virtue,

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<sup>348</sup> For a general discussion of Origen's mysticism, see Rist (1964), pp.195-212 and Louth (1981), pp.52-74.

<sup>349</sup> See *de Principiis* 1.2.3; 2.9.2; 4.4.8. Nemeshegyi (1960) devotes pp.101-128, to illustrating Origen's emphasis on the permanent distinction between God and the created souls. He writes: 'il (scil. Origen) ne s'agit pas de panthéisme, ni même d'une absorption dans le Logos, mais seulement d'une participation . . . il nous paraît certain que chez Origène les esprits créés gardent leur être distinct et leur conscience dans l'état final de eschatologie' (*ibid.* pp. 196, 211). Russell (1988), pp.55-56 similarly argues that 'there is no confusion or absorption' of the rational souls and God.

<sup>350</sup> Rist (1964), p.202, suggests that Origen means no more than 'attaining immortal life.' On the theme of divinization in the Early Church generally, see Winslow (1979), pp.171-201 and Russell (1988). Lot-Borodine (1925), p.526 tells us that it was 'jamais ontique.'

we can hope for the same. For Athanasius and his followers, the nature of Christ was the prototype and guarantor of a universal transformation.<sup>352</sup> Conversely, the Apologists and the Arians presented Christ as a model of freely-willed obedience. The Redeemer presented a salvific paradigm by epitomizing the perfection of ordinary human nature, by becoming a rôle model for ordinary men and women and providing an imitable pattern of behaviour.<sup>353</sup>

Origen however does not believe that the nature of Christ provides a salvific paradigm. He pre-empted the orthodox Christologies of the fourth century by arguing that the Redeemer must be ἀτρεπτός and *incapax mali*. But this fact has absolutely no relevance for the salvation of ordinary men and women. To believe that we shall be ultimately transformed by external grace to achieve a supernatural and hitherto impossible perfection would undermine the strict meritocracy of the Origenian universe. For Origen, man must struggle alone and rely on his own will to achieve whatever goodness he can. Yet this will is eternally τρεπτός, eternally liable to relapse into sin. While the Redeemer is safe in his unchanging and unchangeable will to virtue, those who are to be redeemed remain in an everlasting and inescapable moral predicament, condemned to an eternity of rises and falls.<sup>354</sup>

We can only conclude that the nature of the Redeemer is irrelevant in Origen's scheme of redemption. When he discusses the theory of the soul of Christ, Origen makes it clear that this soul was unique. Every other soul has to choose between virtue and vice; only one soul is, or rather became, good by nature: *solā omnium animarum peccati incapax fuit (de Principiis 4.4.4)*. It would seem that Origen is caught in the following dilemma:

- 1a) The fervour of his anti-Gnostic polemic and his belief in the moral instability of created nature force Origen to conclude that human souls are eternally τρεπτός.
- 1b) He cannot therefore allow Christ an ordinary human soul. To do so, would be to admit that he, too, was eternally τρεπτός.
- 2a) Origen's dualist philosophy forces him to believe that the Incarnation (God's assumption of a human body) could not have occurred without the help of an intermediary.
- 2b) He must therefore believe that Christ assumed a human soul as well as a human body. A soul is the only nature that is equally able to assume a body as to be united with God.

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<sup>351</sup> Wiles (1969). See section 5.2 for more on this.

<sup>352</sup> For an overview of Athanasius' Christology and soteriology, see Stead (1983), Lyman (1994), pp.141-4, 155-6 and Anatolios (1998), pp.24, 60, 164.

<sup>353</sup> For an overview of Apologist and Arian Christology and soteriology, see Lyman (1994), p.156, Roldanus (1968), pp.174 and 274, Gregg and Groh (1981) and Wiles (1969).

The arguments of *de Principiis* 2.6.5-7 are Origen's attempts to reconcile 1b and 2b. But the dilemma is insoluble. Origen can only conclude that the soul of Christ is unique. The life-story of this soul, its journey from τρεπτός to ἀτρεπτος virtue and its final status of union with the Logos, is a story that stands far outside the philosophical and theological framework of the *de Principiis*. It is emphatically not intended to provide an imitable pattern of behaviour for other souls.

The fact that the soul of Christ achieved an ἀτρεπτος moral nature, that he became good by nature and unable to sin is an obvious anomaly in Origen's theological system. For Origen, the nature of Christ is unique and does not provide a salvific paradigm. This is not the function of the Saviour. As we have seen, Origen's Christ came to earth to guide and to teach. The fact that his nature is – and always will be – entirely different from that of ordinary men and women is of no importance.

9.5.

But this is not to deny the importance of the *Imitatio Christi* in Origen's overall theology. Lyman is right to refer us to passages in which Origen urges his readers or his congregation to imitate Christ.<sup>355</sup> What I object to is the inclusion of *de Principiis* 2.6.5-7 in support of the general thesis that the importance of Origen's Christ is basically exhortative and didactic. As we have already seen, the Origenian corpus does not form an organic whole and Origen felt at liberty to use different arguments in different contexts. Lyman has made the mistake of reading the moral exhortations of the Homilies in the light of the philosophical speculations of the *de Principiis*. Origen's congregation at Caesarea would not have read his early works and he would not have wanted them to do so. When the preacher urges his flock to imitate Christ, this does not mean that they are to recall his pre-carnate transformation and be encouraged to take the same path.

As argued above, the distinguishing feature of the Homilies is moral exhortation. In this context, the protreptic function of Christ is simply that he was without sin. In fact, when we are urged to imitate Christ, we are urged to 'imitate' the perfect goodness of God. Crouzel has shown that Origen is very fond of telling us to 'imitate' God the Father;<sup>356</sup> his call to imitate Christ is no different from this. Christ's original, pre-carnate freedom is irrelevant. The Christ of the Homilies is not a model of freely

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<sup>354</sup> Gregg and Groh (1981), p.180.

<sup>355</sup> Lyman (1994), p.76.

<sup>356</sup> Crouzel (1956), p.359.

willed obedience, but of achieved perfection.<sup>357</sup> In this context, the goodness of Christ is the goodness of God.

#### 9.6.

It is the conclusion of this section that Origen has no use for the Saviour's human soul other than as an explanation for the process of the Incarnation. Origen's dualist philosophy requires him to find an intermediary to unite God (spirit) with a human body (matter). It is only a soul, fitted by nature for both heaven and earth, that can perform this pivotal rôle. The assumption by God of a human soul is simply a practical necessity to explain the mechanics of the Incarnation. The elaborate arguments of *de Principiis* 2.6.5-7 are necessary asides to explain and justify this basic belief. They apply to the soul of Christ alone and have no universal protreptic value. It must be emphasized that the nature of this soul is unique because it performs a unique task.

The arguments of *de Principiis* 2.6.5-7 chart the gradual transformation of one particular soul into God, culminating in the complete eradication of any genuinely human consciousness. We have here the philosophical background to and justification for the major characteristics of Origen's New Testament exegesis. Throughout his life on earth, Origen's Christ acts as God, in full and conscious knowledge of his own divinity. Origen's discussion of the Temptation is the perfect illustration of this Christological and exegetical bias.

#### THE TEMPTATION.

##### 10.1.

In chapter 92 of the *Commentary Series on St Matthew*, Origen claims that the Temptation, like the Agony in the Garden, was an experience peculiar to Christ's human nature. In this way Origen feels able to explain the absence of these two episodes from the Fourth Gospel:

*notandum est autem quoniam Marcus quidem et Lucas hoc (scil. the Agony) ipsum scripserunt, qui et tentatum exponunt a diabolo Iesum. Iohannes autem . . . orantem Iesum ut transiret ab eo calix non introducit, sicut nec tentatum exponit a diabolo Iesum. causam autem hanc arbitror esse, quoniam hi quidem magis secundum humanam eius naturam exponunt de eo quam secundum divinam; Iohannes autem magis secundum divinam quam secundum humanam interpretabatur naturam; divinitas autem intentabilis erat. ideo tres quidem evangelistae exposuerunt tentatum: Iohannes autem secundum quod*

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<sup>357</sup> Even Lyman (1994), p.76 admits this. This emphasis on the Saviour's divinity became a major trend in Eastern spirituality. Lot-Borodine (1925), pp. 40-43 argues that the Orthodox Church always understood the *Imitatio Christi* as the imitation of the Saviour's divine nature.

*coeperat 'In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum', nescit Deum Verbum posse tentari.*<sup>358</sup>

Since it is as a man that Christ experiences temptation, his successful defeat of the devil can provide a useful moral paradigm. In the *Homilies on St Luke* and the *Homilies on Exodus*, Origen explicitly presents Christ as a rôle model for his congregation. As Homilies, these works have an overtly exhortative and didactic purpose. Origen urges those listening to follow the example of Christ and resist temptation.<sup>359</sup> Harl and Lyman both discuss Origen's concern with the *Imitatio Christi* and they both refer to the Temptation as an important example of this.<sup>360</sup> It seems to me, however, that Origen is presenting his congregation with an impossible rôle model. Despite his claims to the contrary, it is in fact the case that Origen's Christ faces the devil as God, in conscious knowledge of his own invincible virtue. Origen's exegesis of the Temptation is thus a perfect, if brief, example of his refusal to allow any place to the humanity of the Saviour.

#### 10.2.

Before we examine Origen's discussions of the Temptation of Christ, it would be useful to look at exactly what is involved in temptation and in yielding or resisting. It seems to me that temptation comprises the following:

- (1) The preliminary desire for what is offered in the temptation.
- (2) Some reason why it is right to refuse what is offered and wrong to accept it. In Christian terminology, it is a 'sin' to yield to temptation.
- (3) Resisting or yielding to temptation must be a freely-willed response and hence worthy of praise or blame.
- (4) Resisting temptation must be seen as a difficult struggle. In Christian contexts, temptation is often presented as a trial of strength; agonistic metaphors are common.

From his various discussions of the phenomenon of temptation it is clear that Origen accepted the above points. At *de Principiis* 3.1.4, he considers a situation in which two men, who have both taken a vow of celibacy, are tempted to sleep with a prostitute. The first man succumbs to the temptation and the second man resists. The crucial point in Origen's discussion of this episode is that both men felt the

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<sup>358</sup> The same is said in the *Homilies on St Luke*: *manifestum, non Deum, sed hominem fuisse tentatum* (in *Luc. Hom.* 29.5).

<sup>359</sup> *si igitur Filius Dei Deus pro te homo factus est et tentatur: qui natura homo es, non debes indignari si forte tentaris. quod si tentatus, illum imitatus fueris qui tentatus est, et omne viceris tentamentum* (in *Luc. Hom.* 29.5). See also *Homilies on Exodus* 2.3.



same preliminary desire: τῶν αὐτῶν συμβεβηκότων . . . οἱ μὲν γαργαλισμοὶ καὶ οἱ ἐρεθισμοὶ συμβαίνουσιν. If the second man had simply been a natural celibate with no desire for the woman, he would not have been tempted in the first place and hence could not have been praised for his successful resistance and for his strength of moral purpose. The temptation is presented as a psychomachia, a contest between two conflicting desires, the desire to sleep with the prostitute and the desire to keep the vow of celibacy. Depending on which desire is stronger, the man either yields to the temptation or resists.<sup>361</sup>

Origen's longest and most interesting analysis of the phenomenon of temptation is *de Principiis* 3.2.1-3. Here too the preliminary desire to sin is seen as a central part of the experience. One of Origen's main arguments in this chapter is that all men have the same sinful desires<sup>362</sup> - (caused either by the natural needs of the body<sup>363</sup> or by the improper suggestions of devils and demons) - and that it is up to the individual to be strong enough to resist them, or at least to keep them in check. Origen also stresses the difficulties involved in resisting these preliminary desires. The book is full of agonistic metaphors. In chapter three, our struggles against the flesh and against the opposing powers are compared to athletic or gladiatorial contests. In chapter five, Christians are presented as soldiers engaged in a perpetual war against the devil and his minions. Temptation is a trial of strength in which victory is by no means assured, but must be won through hard labour. As gladiators and athletes can never be certain of winning a competition, so neither can we be certain of resisting temptation.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Harl (1957), pp.283-4 and Lyman (1994), p.77.

<sup>361</sup> It should be noted, however, that Origen's explanation of resisting temptation is rather more intellectualist than would perhaps be expected from a Christian. Presumably under the influence of Stoic moral philosophy, Origen explains the second man's successful resistance by the fact that his rational faculty has been strengthened and nourished by practice (ὁ λόγος δέ, ἅτε ἐπὶ πλείον ἰσχυροποιηθεὶς καὶ τραφεὶς τῇ μελέτῃ), because he has learnt more lessons (πλείονα μαθήματα) and because he has progressed through instruction (βεβαιωθείς τοῖς δόγμασι). But on this subject, see the important remarks by Benjamins (1993), p.218: "this (*de Principiis* 3.1.4) shows the rôle of reason, which has to be developed by learning sound doctrines and practising them as a condition for using external events correctly. Obviously, however, the under developed reason of our ascetic is no excuse for his licentious act. Reason, Origen says, in 3.1.3, has *a priori* possibilities to be developed, i.e. it is up to us whether or not we train our intellect properly."

<sup>362</sup> Origen uses various words to describe these sinful desires: *desiderium*, (*primus*) *motus*, *semina peccatorum*, *initia*, *occasio*, *commotio*, *incitamentum*.

<sup>363</sup> In Williams' terminology, the body provides the *fomes peccati*, (Williams (1927), p.218).

<sup>364</sup> *nec tamen quoniam diximus iusto dei iudicio unumquemque pro virtutis suae quantitate temptari, idcirco putandum est quia omni genere debeat vincere qui temptatur; sicut ne ille qui in agone contendit, quamvis aequa moderatione comparatus sit adversario, non tamen omni genere vincere poterit* (*de Principiis* 3.2.3).

Successful resistance is the result of an arduous struggle to quash the preliminary desire to sin. The most important point in Origen's discussions of temptation is the fact that our resisting or yielding is entirely 'up to us'. We can therefore be justly praised when we resist and justly blamed when we yield. The purpose of the story of the two men and the prostitute at *de Principiis* 3.1.4 is to illustrate that it is an individual's 'free will', and not external circumstance, that is the cause of his keeping or breaking the vow of celibacy.<sup>365</sup> The two men are faced with the same temptation, but their reactions are entirely different. For Origen, a temptation is never irresistible. He goes on to say that it is equally ridiculous to excuse sins by blaming them on our innate characters or physical constitutions, to argue that certain kinds of men are pathologically inclined to commit certain kinds of sin. Origen refers to the possibility of radical character change, a topos of the moral philosophy of his age, to prove the absurdity of such claims. At *de Principiis* 3.2, Origen further emphasizes the importance of individual freedom in the resisting of temptation. Everyone has the strength to resist temptation, but it is up to the individual whether or not he makes proper use of this important gift.<sup>366</sup> Moreover, in this chapter, Origen stresses the importance of free will<sup>367</sup> for the coherent and just application of praise and blame, reward and punishment. If we could be certain of victory in our struggles against the flesh and against the opposing powers, virtue would no longer be praiseworthy. Continuing the agonistic metaphors, Origen tell us that God, the organiser of the games, makes sure that the competitors are fairly matched: to pit us against an opponent who was either much stronger than us or much weaker would make the contest unfair. Temptation must be an equal contest or our succumbing and resisting would no longer be genuinely 'up to us.'

10.3.

Origen's explanation of temptation is philosophically coherent and theologically sound. He makes good use of traditional Stoic arguments to illustrate important Christian convictions. The problems begin with his discussion of the Temptation of Christ. The exegesis of this Biblical episode is notoriously difficult and it is inevitable that theologians will fall into one of two traps. In his article, *The Temptation of God Incarnate*, David Werther argues that one must either deny the sinlessness of

<sup>365</sup> The idea of 'free will' is variously rendered by συγκατάθεσις, ῥοπή τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ, εὐδόκησις and τὸ αὐτεξουσίον. These are all Stoic terms.

<sup>366</sup> *ea autem virtute, quae nobis data est ut vincere possimus, secundum liberi arbitrii facultatem aut industrie utimur et vincimus, aut segniter et superamus (de Principiis 3.2.3).*

<sup>367</sup> Again Origen uses Stoic terminology to convey the idea of freedom: *liberi arbitrii facultas, in nostra potestate, liberi arbitrii potestas.*

Christ or deny the fact of the Temptation.<sup>368</sup> The crux of the problem is whether Christ can be said to have experienced the preliminary desire to sin. As we have seen, this is the fundamental feature of the phenomenon of temptation. But surely the desire to sin is itself a sin, even if accompanied by or followed by a contrary and stronger desire to resist?<sup>369</sup> It is a slur on the perfect goodness of the Saviour to suggest that he was ever tempted to yield to the suggestions of the devil. Could he, even for an instant, have genuinely desired to worship the devil and so gain control of all the kingdoms of the earth? If Christ did not, or could not, experience this kind of preliminary desire, then he cannot be said to have experienced temptation.

As we have seen, Origen believes that Christ was unable to sin.<sup>370</sup> This must include the preliminary desire to sin. There is even the suggestion that Christ's body, because it was born of a Virgin, was without the usual sinful desires.<sup>371</sup> This would give Christ a very unfair advantage over ordinary men and women. He would lack the 'seeds of sin' described at *de Principiis* 3.2.2. He would be exempt from what is known as 'internal temptation', the natural concupiscence of the flesh. In his exegesis of the Temptation, Origen insists that Christ had no desire, however fleeting, to yield to the devil. There was no struggle to resist the preliminary desire to sin. Christ defeats his opponent through his own invincible divinity, not through strength of will nor admirable and imitable self-control. In fact, the wilderness experiences of Origen's Christ are not temptations at all. Christ defeats the devil because he knows that he is God and, as such, perfectly good. It is this knowledge of his own divinity that explains Christ's responses to the devil. The resisting of temptation is just a manifestation of divine power. Origen's Christ knows that he will never, can never, have the slightest inclination to yield to the suggestions of his opponent. This is of course entirely different from the way that ordinary men and women experience temptation. Christ's defeat of the devil cannot therefore provide us with a helpful moral paradigm.

10.4.

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<sup>368</sup> Werther (1993).

<sup>369</sup> On this important point, see Werther (1993), pp.48-9. Swinburne (1994), pp.201-7 and Forsyth (1909), p.301 do not agree.

<sup>370</sup> See sections 8.2-9.6.

<sup>371</sup> On this, see Crouzel (1956), p. 137: "elle (scil. la chair du Christ) aussi est divinisée par son union au Verbe, et l'homme Jesus ne peut connaître la concupiscence et les luttes qu'elle entraîne." At *Homilies on Leviticus* (12.4), *Commentary on St Matthew* (frag. 11) and *Contra Celsum* 3.14 Origen similarly stresses the uniqueness of Christ's body. See section 5.6 for a further discussion of this important point.

There are two surviving passages in which Origen discusses the Temptation of Christ: the *Homilies on St. Luke* (29, 30 and 31) and the *Commentary on St. Matthew* (catena fragments 60-67). The 31<sup>st</sup> *Homily on Luke* is devoted to a discussion of the third and final Temptation, the devil's challenge to Christ to hurl himself off the pinnacle of the Temple and so prove his divinity (Luke 4.9). Origen begins his sermon by highlighting the incredible fact that Christ followed the devil's lead, following him to Jerusalem and up to the top of the temple: *hoc incredibile est*. Why, Origen asks, did Christ follow the devil? The answer we are given is that Christ was completely sure of victory, completely sure that he would never yield to the temptations of the devil. Here is a Christ who feels no fear and no worry at the prospect of temptation, because he knows that he will resist whatever the devil might offer. Unlike us, who pray *lead us not into temptation*, Christ actively seeks it out and offers himself to it, calmly, willingly and entirely confidently. Origen compares Christ to an athlete agreeing to take part in a competition. Origen is again using agonistic metaphors, but with an entirely different message. It will be remembered that at *de Principiis* 3.2.2, Origen noted that the contests between man and the opposing powers are always fair and equal. As in boxing, beginners are pitted against beginners, boys against boys etc., so in the spiritual world no one is tested beyond or beneath his capacity. In contrast to this, the contest between Christ and the devil is entirely unequal. The devil has no chance of winning and Christ is fully aware of this fact. He approaches the contest with the blasé confidence of a prize fighter about to take on a young boy:

*hoc incredibile est, ut diabolus duceret Filium Dei, et ille sequeretur. sequebatur plane quasi athleta ad tentationem sponte profiscens, non formidibat tentatem, neque insidias callidissimi pertimescebat inimici, et quodomodo loquebatur: 'duc quo vis, tenta ut placet. ad tentandum sponte me tribuo, sustineo quae suggereris. praebo me in quibuscunque tentaveris, invenies me in omnibus fortiolem' (in Luc. Hom.31).*

The implication of this passage is that the devil would not have been able to 'tempt' Christ, had Christ not consented to play along with the charade. A very similar picture emerges from the *Commentary on St. Matthew* (catena fragment 62). Again, Origen's main point is that Christ willingly offered himself to the temptation and that it was he who provided the devil with his means and opportunity. Origen's Christ knows exactly what the devil has in mind and he makes it his business to facilitate the plans of his opponent. Christ knows that in the first temptation the devil plans to deceive him, as he deceived Adam, through the offering of some kind of food. The devil is afraid, however, that his plans will go

awry because Christ is not hungry. Christ, therefore, willingly fasts. It is his subsequent hunger that provides the devil with his opportunity to offer the first temptation:

ᾠσα ἐνεθυμείτο ὁ διάβολος μηχανήματα πρὸς ὑποσκελισμὸν τοῦ φαινομένου Ἀδάμ, αὐτὸς ἐδίδοτα λαβάς, οἶον. ἔλεγεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὁ διάβολος· τὸν πρῶτον ἄνθρωπον διὰ βρώσεως ἠπαάτησα, οὗτος οὐ πεινᾷ ἵνα αὐτὸν ᾠπατήσω διὰ βρώσεως; ἐνέδωκε τῇ πείνῃ (*Commentary on St Matthew*, Catena Fragment 62A).<sup>372</sup>

It could perhaps be said that Origen's Christ was genuinely tempted to turn the stones into bread because he was genuinely hungry. In the *Commentary on Galatians*, Origen explicitly argues, against the docetics, that having fasted for forty days Christ was truly hungry (*Commentary on Galatians*, PG 14, 1295CD). But against this, we have the evidence of the *Commentary on St Matthew* that Christ's hunger was a deliberate ploy to force the devil to show his hand. There could not therefore have been any genuine desire to perform the miracle.

Origen gives a similar exegesis of the second temptation. Having learnt the plans of the devil, Christ provides the means and opportunity for their fulfilment by willing climbing the mountain.<sup>373</sup> Once again, the experiences of Origen's Christ are not at all the experiences of an ordinary human temptation. First, only God could have such a meticulous foreknowledge of the enemy's plans. Second, no ordinary human would have such confidence in his ability to resist temptation as not only to accept it willingly, but actually to provide the means and opportunity for it to happen.

This Christ has no fear of temptation and no difficulty in resisting it. He knows full well and at all times that he is going to defeat the devil. Indeed, for Origen, this is the very reason for Christ's going into the wilderness: τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ὑποφωνῶν ἀνήγαγεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, παρορμῶν αὐτὸν ἤδη καθελεῖν τοῦ διαβόλου τὴν μεγαλαυχίαν (*Commentary on St Matthew*, Catena Fragment 60A). Origen provides two other Scriptural examples of God foreknowing in detail the plans of his opponent and providing the means and opportunity for their fulfilment. It was God who allowed his own creature, the serpent, to speak to Eve and it was God who allowed Satan to test Job.<sup>374</sup> What is important about these comparisons is the implication that even in the wilderness Christ was

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<sup>372</sup> See also Catena Fragment 62B, in which Origen adds the crucial ἐκὼν to Matthew 4.2: *when he had willingly fasted*.

<sup>373</sup> ἔλεγεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὁ διάβολος· εἰ ἦν εἰς ὄρος ὑψηλόν, ἐδείκνυον σχήματα καὶ ἐπηγγελλόμεν αὐτῷ καὶ πολλάκις ἠπάτων αὐτόν. ἀνῆλθεν ὁ σωτὴρ εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ λαβὴν (*Commentary on St Matthew*, Catena Fragment 62A).

<sup>374</sup> *Commentary on St Matthew*, Catena Fragment 62B.

(consciously) an omnipotent and omniscient God: as God once allowed the devil to tempt Eve, so he now allows himself to be similarly tempted.

Despite asserting that the Temptation is an experience of Christ human nature, Origen's explanation of the defeat of the devil seems to depend entirely on the fact of the Saviour's divinity.<sup>375</sup> It is as God that Christ resists the Temptation. But the devil is entirely unaware of this crucial fact. He is unable to understand the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation and Christ is careful to hide his true identity.<sup>376</sup>

The devil assumes that he is tempting a man,<sup>377</sup> albeit an extraordinary man: ἀγνοῶν, ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνηνθρώπησεν – ἔλαθε γὰρ αὐτὸν ἡ ἀπόρρητος ἐνανθρώπησις – ὑπέλαβεν ὅτι ἄνθρωπος ὢν ἠὲδοκῆθη τῷ θεῷ διὰ τὰς ἀρετὰς αὐτοῦ, καὶ λοιπὸν ἐφθόνησεν αὐτῷ τῆς τηλικαύτης τιμῆς, ὥσπερ καὶ τῷ παλαιῷ Ἀδὰμ, καὶ ἔσπευσεν ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνον ἐκβαλεῖν καὶ τοῦτον αὐτῆς. διὸ καὶ προσελθὼν ἐγγὺς πρῶτην προσάγει πείραν τῆς γαστριμαργίας, δι' ἧς εἶλε καὶ τὸν πρῶτον Ἀδὰμ (*in Luc. Hom.* 29, Fragment 56).

10.5.

Origen often discusses the devil's ignorance of the Saviour's divinity. For him, much of the drama of the Redemption depends upon Christ's deception of an ignorant devil. For example, he goes to great lengths to explain why the Virgin Mary should have bothered to marry St. Joseph. The reason for this was to trick the devil into thinking that Christ was an ordinary mortal, conceived through ordinary marital relations (*In Luc. Hom* 6.3).<sup>378</sup> It seems to me, however, that the whole importance of the Temptation lies in the fact that Christ was tempted as a man; it should make no difference that the devil is unaware of his opponent's divine nature. There is a vital soteriological significance to Christ experiencing a genuine Temptation, which Origen has failed to recognize. It is crucial to the Redemption that Christ be in no way better able to resist the Temptation than ordinary men. As man fell by free will (by a freely chosen sin), so he must be redeemed by free will (by freely chosen

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<sup>375</sup> c.f. *Commentary on St Matthew* (Catena Fragment 65A). The devil is ridiculed for thinking that the Psalmist's words – *He will give his angels charge over thee* – refer to Christ, as if he were in need of God's help. Origen emphasizes the divinity of Christ by quoting his reply to the tempter – *thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God* (Matthew 4.7).

<sup>376</sup> *cum ab ipso diabolo teneretur, nusquam confessus est Dei se esse Filium . . . tacuit semper se esse Filium Dei* (*in Luc. Hom.* 6). Crouzel (1989), p.189 discusses the connexion between virtue and knowledge in Origen's system: "only a pure soul can know God and the divine realities and consequently the devil is ignorant of everything that concerns the order of salvation: that cannot be revealed to him because he is incapable of understanding it."

<sup>377</sup> c.f. Crouzel, Fournier and Périchon (1962), p.502: "Le diable, père des hérétiques, professe a l'égard du Christ des opinions adptionistes."

<sup>378</sup> Consider also the monumental deception of the devil that occurred after Christ's death, when his soul descended into Hades (*Commentary on St Matthew* 16.8). For a discussion of this, see section 7.4.

virtue).<sup>379</sup> This is certainly not Origen's understanding of the Temptation. Once again, we see Origen's reluctance to allow any salvific rôle to the Saviour's human nature. Origen's exegesis of the last and most important temptation, the temptation to avoid the Passion, reveals a similar bias. Christ's prayer for the cup to pass does not express a genuine desire to avoid the Crucifixion. Origen's Christ is not tempted, however fleetingly, to escape death. As the omniscient and entirely beneficent Saviour, he is fully aware of the benefits of his suffering and death. He wholeheartedly wants to die.

## THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN.

### 11.1.

In his useful article, "Ancient and High Medieval Interpretations of Gethsemane", Kevin Madigan begins with an over-view of the Christological problems involved in the Gospel story.<sup>380</sup>

- (1) That Christ appears overwhelmed by passion and emotion.
- (2) That he appears ignorant of his salvific rôle, of the necessity of his death for the Redemption of the world.
- (3) That he appears to be in doubt when he asks – *If it be possible*.
- (4) That he appears to submit to death involuntarily, as he prayed three times to be allowed to avoid it.

The task of the Biblical exegete was to interpret the story in such a way as to avoid the above four problems. Madigan discusses a wide range of interpretations, from Ambrose to Aquinas. It seems to me, however, that no exegesis is quite so full or quite so successful as that of Origen. We shall see that in his various discussions of the Agony in the Garden Origen tries very hard to present a Christ who is Stoically calm in the face of death, who understands perfectly well the soteriological importance of the Crucifixion and who therefore consciously and wholeheartedly wants to die. We begin our discussion with Origen's solution to problem number (1).

(A) Solving the problem of Christ's emotional or mental distress: the Saviour as Stoic Sage.

### 12.1.

When he had eaten the Last Supper, Christ went with his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he spoke one of the most famous, most controversial and most discussed of all Biblical verses: *my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death* (Matthew 26.38). For the exegetes of the Early Church, the belief that Christ suffered emotional distress caused countless problems. Physical suffering, tiredness,

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<sup>379</sup> On these points, see Swinburne (1989), p.68.

hunger and thirst, could be easily explained as the natural consequence, even the proof, of Christ's having assumed a real human body. Indeed, these facts were welcomed as Scriptural evidence of the absurdity of docetism.<sup>381</sup> Yet the Gospels also suggest that Christ experienced psychological suffering. In particular, the Agony in the Garden seems to hinge upon Christ's fear and worry at the prospect of imminent death.

As we saw in section 4.3, it was a fundamental doctrine of almost all ancient theology, pagan and Christian, that God could not experience emotion (πάθος). Origen certainly believed that this was the case. He was very ready to follow the pagans' lead and allegorize Biblical references to God's anger, vengeance or jealousy. Furthermore, since ἀπάθεια was the eternal, blessed state of God, it became the moral ideal for mortals striving for ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ. Origen's writings are full of demands to suppress passion and emotion. To believe that Christ experienced emotion would seem not only to refute the fact of his divinity, it would also seem to reduce his status to that of a weak-willed, contemptible man who had not yet learned self-control. Celsus laughs at Christ for being the emotional weakling described in the Gospels.<sup>382</sup> It is within the context of this pagan ridicule and of his own philosophical persuasions that Origen is so unwilling to allow Christ any genuine emotions.

Origen's longest and most interesting discussion of the Agony is that of the *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* (chapters 90-95). His first solution to the problem of Christ's emotional suffering is simply to refer it to the Saviour's human nature: *coepit quidem tristari secundum humanam naturam, quae talibus passionibus subdita est, non autem secundum divinam virtutem, quae ab huiusmodi passione longe remota est.*<sup>383</sup> But although Origen admits that Christ's human nature is theoretically passible, we shall see that he takes great pains to minimize as far as possible his actual experience of emotion. Origen's exegesis can be usefully compared with that of St Ambrose. The Bishop of Milan, writing against the Arians, could rejoice in the fact that *Christus timet . . . ut homo turbatur, ut homo flet . . . turbatur anima secundum humanam fragilitatem turbatur.*<sup>384</sup> Ambrose had no problem with emotions *per se*, only with the heretical suggestion that they might be ascribed to the Son of God and hence be

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<sup>380</sup> Madigan (1995), pp.158-161.

<sup>381</sup> On this, see Gesché (1959), p.385.

<sup>382</sup> *Contra Celsum* 2.9; 2.24; 7.50.

<sup>383</sup> It is with this in mind that Origen feels able to explain the absence of the Agony in the Garden from the fourth Gospel: *Iohannes autem, propositum habens exponere Iesum Verbum Deum, sciens quia ipse est vita et resurrectio, nescit Deum impassibilem refugere passionem* (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 92).

<sup>384</sup> Quoted in Peter Lombard, *Sentences* 15.1 and 17.3 (Madigan (1995), p.162).



proof of his subordination to the Father. Origen agrees that Christ's divine nature is impassible, but this is not enough. He must show that even his humanity is free from such weakness. Unlike Ambrose, Origen cannot accept that Christ was really afraid, that he really cried and that he was really confused or disturbed. As a firm believer in the virtues of ἀπάθεια, Origen must present Christ as the paradigm *par excellence* of Stoic calm.

## 12.2.

In chapter 90 of the *Commentary Series on St Matthew*, Origen explicitly attacks those who try to defend or even to advocate the emotional life by quoting the example of Christ in the Garden. Origen's response to this hinges upon a meticulous exegesis of Matthew 26.37 – *He began to be sorrowful and very heavy*. Origen highlights the word 'began' (*coepit*). It is crucial that Christ be said only to *begin* to be sorrowful and very heavy. For Origen, there is a huge difference between beginning to be sorrowful and actually being sorrowful. He concludes that Christ did not experience the full-blown emotion, but only the beginnings of it, a foretaste (*gustum*):

*considera quia non dixit tristibatur et taedibatur, sed coepit tristari et taedari. multum enim interest inter tristari et incipere tristari. si ergo aliquis, defendens passiones humanas, profert nobis etiam ipsum tristatum fuisse Iesum, audiat quoniam qui 'tentatus est per omnia secundum similitudinem praeter peccatum', hic non est tristatus tristitia passionis ipsius, sed factus est secundum humanam naturam tantum in ipso principio tristitiae et pavoris (Commentary Series on St Matthew 90).<sup>385</sup>*

Origen feels able to defend the Saviour from the accusation that he was afraid by stressing the fact that he felt only the *beginnings* of fear and that these beginnings are to be carefully distinguished from emotion proper. In this passage Origen is making implicit use of the theory of προπάθεια, a theory that he fully develops elsewhere.<sup>386</sup> Origen is the first Christian author to use the term and the first to make use of the theory as an exegetical tool.<sup>387</sup> His arguments would prove to be of enduring popularity and would be seen as one of the most successful ways of explaining the Agony in the Garden.<sup>388</sup>

<sup>385</sup> c.f. *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* 90: *coepit pavere et tristari, nihil amplius tristitiae vel pavoris patiens nisi principium tantum. nec enim scripta est quia pavit vel tristatus est, sed coepit pavere et coepit tristari.*

<sup>386</sup> *Selecta in Psalmos* 4.5 (PG 12 1141D-1144B). This passage will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>387</sup> So Gesché (1959), p.191.

<sup>388</sup> Origen's doctrine of προπάθεια was repeated, almost verbatim, by Didymus the Blind in the fourth century. Jerome's discussions of the *antepassiones* in his *Epistle to Salvina* are basically a repetition of Origen's arguments in the *Selecta in Psalmos*. More importantly, Jerome follows Origen in using the theory to explain the Agony in the Garden: *aliud est enim constrictari et aliud incipere constrictari, constrictabatur autem non timore patiendi, qui ad hos venerat ut pateretur (Commentary on St. Matthew 94)*. See *ibid.*, preface 91, where Jerome admits to being influenced by Origen. The theory of

Gesché tells us that the theory of *προπάθεια* originated with the Stoics.<sup>389</sup> Richard Layton provides a useful and detailed discussion of the pagan philosophical background.<sup>390</sup> He begins by reminding us that, according to Stoic psychology, even passion and emotion were dependent upon rational judgement: they were the result of a considered decision on how to react to a particular situation. This theory must of course be seen within the context of Stoic monism, according to which the soul is a unified whole, not divided into ‘rational’ and ‘emotional’ compartments. But this convenient theory foundered upon the rocks of undeniable empirical evidence. It is obviously the case that certain emotional reactions are not within the control of reason and that not even the wise man is able to avoid them. It was in attempt to explain this kind of reaction that the Stoics developed the doctrine of *προπάθεια*. According to this doctrine, emotion comprises two distinct stages. The first stage is an involuntary and unavoidable first movement, an initial disturbance of the soul occasioned by an external stimulus. The second stage is a voluntary and rational reaction, the decision whether to suppress or to develop these preliminary feelings. It is only at the second stage that the genuine emotion was believed to occur. Layton cites chapter two of Seneca’s *de Ira* as a particularly clear analysis of the phenomenon of *προπάθεια*. Of course Origen could not have known the Senecan passage first hand, but the general idea is present in a number of Stoic authors,<sup>391</sup> and Origen’s familiarity with Stoicism is well known and well documented.<sup>392</sup> The use of the doctrine of *προπάθεια* in Origen’s exegesis is almost certainly the direct result of his acquaintance with Stoic philosophy.<sup>393</sup>

Origen’s doctrine of *προπάθεια* is most fully developed in the *Selecta in Psalmos* 4.5 (PG 12, 1141D-1144B). He uses the Psalmist’s command – *Be angry and sin not* – as an illustration of the theory. The

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*προπάθεια* was also popular in the Middle Ages. It appears in the immensely influential *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and thereafter became a staple ingredient of Mendicant exegesis. On all the above, see Madigan (1995), pp. 165-7. It is very sad that neither the Mediaeval theologians nor the modern commentators acknowledge Origen as the originator of this popular and successful exegesis.

<sup>389</sup> Gesché (1959), p.394. See also Heine (2002), p.194.

<sup>390</sup> Layton (2000), pp.263-265.

<sup>391</sup> We are, of course, in the unfortunate position of having lost a great deal of ancient evidence. Origen would presumably have known many more references to the theory than is possible today. Layton refers to Aulus Gellius 19, 1.4-8 (discussed in Augustine, *City of God* 9.4). For an analysis of the Augustine passage, see O’Daly (1999), p.119. O’Daly emphasizes the fact that the second stage (at which a *προπάθεια* might become a *πάθος*) is entirely under the control of reason, which either gives or withholds its assent to these first movements. On first movements in pagan Stoicism, see Sorabji (2000), pp.66-75. He discusses the Senecan passage in some detail and also refers to Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* 3.82-3), Plutarch (*On Moral Virtue* 449 AB) and Epictetus (4.6.10). Once again, the crucial point emerges that it is the sage’s refusal to give the assent of reason to the first movements that saves him from experiencing emotion proper. For the Stoics, the achievement of *ἀπάθεια* was a rational and voluntary decision. As we shall see, Origen is in full agreement with this.

<sup>392</sup> See, for example, Chadwick (1947).

<sup>393</sup> All the above comes from Layton (2000), pp.263-6.

first phrase – *Be angry* – refers to an involuntary (ἀπροαίρετον) first movement (προπάθειαν), a tumult (κλόνον) or disturbance (σεισμόν) of the soul. This preliminary ‘anger’ is not a sin (ἁμαρτήμα) and is not blameworthy (οὐ ψεκτώς). The second phrase – *and sin not* – refers to the second stage at which we decide, voluntarily, how to react to these first movements of anger, whether to develop them and become angry or to suppress them and retain our equilibrium. Layton draws our attention to a similar discussion of the doctrine of προπάθεια in the *Commentary on Ephesians* (fragment 19.68-75).<sup>394</sup> Here, too, Origen carefully distinguishes the two stages of anger: the first is simply the involuntary first movement, occasioned by an external mishap. What is particularly important about this passage is Origen’s insistence that not even the ‘perfect’ can avoid experiencing προπάθειαι.<sup>395</sup>

The theory, although not the technical vocabulary, is also found in the *de Principiis*. As we have seen, the story of the two men and the prostitute at *de Principiis* 3.1.4 hinges on the fact that both men experience the same preliminary sensation (τῶν αὐτῶν συμβεβηκότων . . . οἱ μὲν γαργαλισμοὶ καὶ οἱ ἐρεθισμοὶ συμβαίνουσιν), but only the first man takes the conscious decision to develop the feeling and consummate his desire. As Jackson points out, this story is entirely Stoic in its implications: it is in fact lifted directly from Epictetus.<sup>396</sup> Similarly, at *de Principiis* 3.2.2, Origen argues that no one can escape the first movements (*primi motus*) or beginnings (*initia*) of sin. It is impossible to avoid the preliminary feelings of sexual desire, covetousness or anger, but it is the task of the Christian to keep such feelings well under control – in other words, to prevent a προπάθεια from becoming a πάθος. In these two passages, Origen keeps very close to the original Stoic theory. In particular, he is keen to stress that the successful resisting of προπάθειαι is the work of a properly trained intellect.<sup>397</sup>

So for Origen, a προπάθεια is an involuntary and unavoidable reaction. The man who experiences a προπάθεια is not responsible for the feeling. It is only when he allows a προπάθεια to become a πάθος that he can properly and fairly be blamed. It is within the context of such discussions that we are to understand Origen’s insistence that Christ experienced only the *beginnings* of fear and worry (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 90). His feelings in Gethsemane are involuntary, unavoidable and

<sup>394</sup> Layton (2000), p.267.

<sup>395</sup> See Heine’s comments *ad loc*: “a προπάθεια is common to all people and is not under their control . . . Origen is clearly referring to a sudden flare-up of anger which occurs simultaneously with some unexpected stimulus” (Heine (2002), p.193).

<sup>396</sup> Jackson (1966), p.60.

<sup>397</sup> These passages are discussed by Sorabji (2000), pp.346-351. He draws particular attention to Origen’s use of the technical Stoic term συγκατάθεσις at *de Principiis* 3.1.4. Origen’s explanation of resisting temptation is worked out within an orthodox Stoic framework. On this, see our discussions in section 10.2.

entirely blameless. It is vitally important that Christ did not take the voluntary decision to experience the full πάθος. While Origen cannot deny that Christ felt the beginnings of passion and emotion - the Gospels explicitly state that he did - these can be explained and excused by reference to the Stoic theory of προπάθεια.

### 12.3.

In the *Commentary Series on St Matthew*, Origen offers another, entirely different explanation for these beginnings of fear and worry. This explanation has nothing whatever to do with the present situation and gives Origen even more scope to present Christ in the guise of the immovable Stoic sage. Origen suggests that Christ experienced these 'beginnings' of emotion, or rather *pretended* to experience them, for didactic purposes. This show of fear was intended as a moral lesson, by which Christ might teach the disciples the dangers of over-confidence (that pride which comes before a fall) and the need for fear (that humility which leads men to seek the help of the Lord).<sup>398</sup> For Origen, Christ's main pupil for this lesson is St. Peter. Earlier in the same *Commentary*, Peter had been severely criticized for boasting at the Last Supper that *though all men shall be offended because of thee this night, yet will I never be offended* (Matthew 26.33). Overconfident in his own moral strength, St Peter failed to recognize the weakness of the human condition and the constant need for divine assistance. Despite his extravagant claims, the disciple denied Christ three times.<sup>399</sup> In Gethsemane, Christ assumed the persona of a humble and fearful man in order to show Peter, and countless others, the proper way for a Christian to behave. The Agony in the Garden has become a didactic charade.<sup>400</sup> According to this exegesis, it was not the thought of an impending, terrible death that occasioned these 'beginnings' of fear and worry, nor is it the case that Christ himself recognized the need for humility and dependence upon God. Origen believes that Christ's behaviour in Gethsemane is, to a large extent, a pretence acted out for the benefit of the disciples:

*factus est . . . tantum in ipso principio tristitiae et pavoris, ut ostendat discipulis suis praesentibus, maxime Petro magna de se existimanti, rebus istis, quod et postea eis dixit, quia 'spiritus promptus est, caro autem infirma'. et non est aliquando confidendum in ea, sed semper timendum de ea, quia incauta confidentia ad iactantiam ducit, timor autem infirmitatis ad auxilium Dei confugere adhortatur, sicut et*

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<sup>398</sup> This is surely a precursor of the Athanasian explanation of Christ's emotions as mere pedagogic condescension. According to Athanasius, Christ pretended to experience passion and emotion in order to illustrate certain moral points (Gesché (1959), pp.388-99). In this, as in so much else, we see Origen pre-empting the great Christological doctrines of following century.

<sup>399</sup> *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* 88.

*Dominum ipsum paululum progredi et cadere in faciem et orare (Commentary Series on St Matthew 90).*<sup>401</sup>

This exegesis is very similar to Origen's explanation of Christ retreat to Ephraim at *Commentary on St John* 28.23 (18). Christ left Jerusalem not because he was afraid, but because he wanted to teach future Christians the important moral lesson that they should not rush into martyrdom: ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τούτοις παραπλήσια ἀναγεγράφθαι νομίζω βουλομένου τοῦ λόγου ἐπιστρέφειν ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ θερμότερον καὶ ἀλογιστότερον ἐπιπηδᾶν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἔως θανάτου ἀγωνίζεσθαι περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ μαρτυρεῖν.<sup>402</sup> Once again, Origen's main aim is to minimize Christ's experience of emotion.

#### 12.4.

It is in the *Contra Celsum*, however, that we find the most extreme examples of Origen's tendency to 'Stoicize' Christ. It is of course a distinguishing characteristic of the apologetic genre to present Christ as a moral exemplum whom even the pagans could admire. We have already seen how pagan philosophers placed a premium on the virtues of ἀπάθεια and how they ridiculed passion and emotion as the irrational reaction of an untrained mind. The wise man would not be angered by a theft, grieved by a death or aroused by a beautiful woman. But it was one's attitude to physical pain and death that was the real test.

At *Contra Celsum* 7.53, Celsus refers to two famous examples of philosophical endurance, Epictetus and Anaxarchus.<sup>403</sup> Celsus contrasts what he sees as the cowardly and pathetic behaviour of Christ with the staunch heroism of the pagan heroes. Celsus then wonders why the Christians chose such a wretched man to admire when they could be worshipping the likes of Epictetus and Anaxarchus. Origen's response to these criticisms is to argue that Christ is every bit as admirable as Epictetus or Anaxarchus. In fact, his attitude to death is even more 'Stoic' than theirs.

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<sup>400</sup> So, Harl (1956), p.241.

<sup>401</sup> c.f. *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* 91: *ad hoc autem adduxit eos, maxime Petrum magna de se confidentem, ut videant et audiant ubi est posse hominis et quomodo impetratur . . . et discant non magna de se sapere, sed humilia aestimare, nec veloces esse ad promittendum, sed solliciti ad orandum. ideo et illos duxit qui videbatur fideliores et fortes, similiter Petro, in quibus similiter facile poterat locus invenire iactantia propter fiducium fidei.* See also *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* 92: *nam sicut multum confidere non debemus, ne nostram virtutem videamur profiteri, sic multum pusillanimiter agere, et diffidere non debemus, ne dei adiutoris nostri videamur pronuntiare.*

<sup>402</sup> See also *Commentary on St Matthew* (frag. 70), where Origen claims that it was not because of fear (οὐ διὰ δειλίαν) that Christ left Jerusalem on hearing of the death of John the Baptist. His stay in Capernaum is an allegorical reference to the future conversion of the Gentiles.

<sup>403</sup> Epictetus was famous for his indifferent attitude to external misfortune. Celsus refers to the story of his master breaking his leg: "When his master twisted his leg, he simply replied – 'you're breaking it.' And when he had broken it – 'did I not tell you that you were breaking it?'" Anaxarchus is less well

Origen begins by stressing the Saviour's silence. The meekness of Christ before Pilate was a commonplace of the anti-Christian polemic.<sup>404</sup> Origen turns the criticism on its head and cites Christ's silence as grounds for particular admiration. While the pagans bothered themselves with memorable *bons mots*, Christ kept a dignified silence. The inference is that Christ could easily have defended himself from the spurious charges, but as he had no desire to avoid death there was no need for him to enter into any discussion (*Contra Celsum* 7.55).<sup>405</sup> Origen continues his defence of Christ by pointing out his courage (καρτερία), patient endurance (υπομονή) and meekness (πραότης).<sup>406</sup> Whatever abuse he endured, Christ refrained from saying anything irritable (ἀγανακτητικόν) or cowardly (ἀγενές) (*Contra Celsum* 7.55).

This Christ has achieved all the moral ideals of a Stoic wise man. He faces death with absolute equanimity. He feels no fear at the prospect of terrible pain. Even the vocabulary used by Origen is Stoic.<sup>407</sup> Yet Origen has perhaps 'over-Stoicized' the Redeemer. Gauthier points out that the Stoic ideal of καρτερία is in fact the opposite of the New Testament virtue of υπομονή. Origen is wrong to conflate the two. While the Christian is urged to depend entirely on the grace of God, the Stoic sage prided himself upon a lordly self-sufficiency.<sup>408</sup>

At *Commentary Series on St Matthew* 119, Origen is similarly anxious to show how Christ's silence before Pilate was simply a reflection of proverbial Stoic calm: *miratus est (scil. Pilatus) videns eum in tranquilla et quieta sapientiae gravitate . . . Christus inturbabilis maneret et staret ante mortem quae apud omnes homines terribilis existimatur*. The Stoic flavour of the passage is more obvious in the Greek fragments, where Christ is described as ἀτάραχον, ἀτρεπτον and γαληνόν. The Gospels make no reference to Christ's emotional state at this stage, but Origen feels obliged to paint an elaborate

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known. His main claim to fame was his response to the tyrant who was crushing him in a mortar: 'Beat on! Beat on the pouch of Anaxarchus! You're not hurting *him*!' (Chadwick's translation).

<sup>404</sup> Frede (1997), p.123. See, for example, Porphyry's *Against the Christians* (in Macarius Magnes *Apocrit.* 3.1).

<sup>405</sup> For more on the subject of the Saviour's silence see *Contra Celsum*, preface 1-2. Gauthier (1949), p.231 quotes from preface 2 (μεγαλοφυῶς ὑπερεωρακέναι τοὺς κατηγοροῦντες) and notes the overtly Stoic terminology.

<sup>406</sup> 'Meekness' is perhaps not the perfect translation for πραότης. It does not have connotations of mildness or humility. It is the rough equivalent of ἀπάθεια, the opposite of ἀγριότης and ὀργή (so LSJ). See Gregory of Nyssa (*de Beat.* 2), where πραότης is defined as the victory of reason over passion.

<sup>407</sup> Both καρτερία and πραότης are used by Epictetus (2.22.36, 3.10.6, 3.20.10, 4.5.22, 4.7.12 and *Enchiridion* 10). Origen knew Epictetus first hand (Jackson (1966), p.20). *SVF* gives many citations of both καρτερία and πραότης (3.60.6-7, 3.61.20, 3.64.23, 3.64.35, 3.65.13-14, 3.66.13, 3.66.15, 3.66.29, 3.67.24, 3.67.40, 3.93.28).

picture of complete and utter calm. Origen must always avoid the inference (seized upon by the pagans) that Christ's silence was an indication of his fear.

12.5.

Having looked at Christ's behaviour before Pilate, Origen turns his attention to the Agony in the Garden (*Contra Celsum* 7.55). Naturally, he denies that Christ's prayer for the cup to pass was a reflection of cowardice (ἀπό ἀγεννείας). This would be entirely incongruent with the Saviour's usual moral character, as epitomized in the Arraignment before Pilate. Origen declines to give an explanation of what the prayer *does* mean; he simply refers the reader elsewhere. It obviously suits Origen's apologetic agenda to concentrate upon Christ's final acceptance of the cup, rather than his initial refusal. In explaining Christ's acquiescence to the Passion, Origen once again presents a man who conforms to pagan heroic ideals: παντὸς οὐτινοσοῦν τὸ περιστατικὸν οὐ προηγούμενον εἶναι νομίζοντος, ἀλλ' ὑπομένοντος τὸ μὴ προηγουμένως συμβαῖνον, ὅταν καιρὸς καλῇ. ἅλλα καὶ οὐκ ἐνδεδωκότος ἦν ἡ φωνή, εὐαρεστούμενου δὲ τοῖς συμβαίνουσι καὶ προτιμώντος τὰ ἀπὸ προνοίας περιστατικὰ ἢ λέγουσα φωνή· πλὴν οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω, ἀλλὰ τί σύ (*Contra Celsum* 7.55).

This exegesis has many advantages. Origen presents Christ as the fearless hero who does not merely 'give in' to death, but who actually finds it 'well pleasing' and 'preferable'. This attitude, the traditional philosophical response to external misfortune, was deliberately intended to impress the likes of Celsus. It is rather far removed from the original Gospel passage. Naturally Origen declines to mention the fact that Christ was *exceeding sorrowful* or that *he began to be sorrowful and very heavy*. Origen's method in the *Contra Celsum* is to ignore difficult verses, unless Celsus draws direct attention to them. This Christ, like every good Stoic, is stripped of all emotion.

There are however some major difficulties with this passage. It is surely rather irreverent to reduce Christ's Agony to the level of philosophical one-up-man-ship and to compare the Saviour with the likes of Anaxarchus and Epictetus. Most worrying of all however is the suggestion that the Crucifixion was an unfortunate accident (συμβαῖνον) which befell Christ and that, although he submits to it (ὑπομένοντος), it is certainly not a course of events that is προηγούμενον.<sup>409</sup> This exegesis is entirely different from the one given in the *Commentary on St Matthew*, which we shall soon be discussing. In

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<sup>408</sup> Gauthier (1949), p.227. Gauthier is discussing Clement, but his remarks apply equally well to Origen.

<sup>409</sup> προηγούμενον is a notoriously difficult word to translate. For a discussion, see Sharples (1975), p.49. The word is often used in juxtaposition with συμβαῖνον (as in this passage). In such contexts, it

the Gospel *Commentary*, Origen insists that Christ welcomed the Crucifixion because he was fully and consciously aware of the soteriological significance of his death. At *Contra Celsum* 7.55, Christ seems basically unwilling to die and totally unaware of the momentous implications of the Passion. In the end, he acquiesces, but only as the wise man acquiesces to the plans and arrangements of an inscrutable providence.

Origen provides a similar interpretation of Gethsemane at *Contra Celsum* 2.25. Once again, Christ is deliberately presented as a Stoic wise man, praised for his *παρασκευή*, *εὐτονία* and *μεγαλοψυχία*. At *Contra Celsum* 2.42, Christ is said to exhibit *καρτερίαν καὶ μεγαλοψυχίαν*. These are certainly not New Testament virtues.<sup>410</sup> In fact, *μεγαλοψυχία* is an inversion of traditional Christian morality; its defining feature was an arrogant contempt for everything except the philosophic self.<sup>411</sup> The Stoic wise man was entirely self-sufficient: he did not need even God. The descriptions of Christ at *Contra Celsum* 2.25 and 2.42 are perfectly in tune with pagan moral philosophy. This has obvious apologetic advantages. To present a Christ who embodied the New Testament virtues of love, pity, mercy and forgiveness would only have increased Celsus' scorn.

Origen was always very much aware of the audience for whom he was writing. As we have seen, he was master of a great many genres and suited his style and his arguments to the requirements of each.<sup>412</sup> The *Contra Celsum* was written as a response to a pagan intellectual, in an attempt to convince people like him of the truths of Christianity.<sup>413</sup> Origen never forgets the fact that he is writing for pagans, and for pagans steeped in philosophical learning. The didactic platitudes of the Homilies would be no use here nor would the complex theology of the Biblical Commentaries. As the *Summa Theologica* is different from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*,<sup>414</sup> so the *Commentary Series on St Matthew* is different from the *Contra Celsum*.

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can be variously translated as 'principal', 'prior in importance', 'chief', 'purposeful' (Sharples and LSJ).

<sup>410</sup> Borret (editor *Sources Chrétiennes*, ad loc.) writes: "Origène utilise ici la classification Stoïcienne des vertues."

<sup>411</sup> Gauthier (1949), p.227. See the definition of *μεγαλοψυχία* given by Diogenes Laertius at *SVF* 3.7.127.

<sup>412</sup> See section 6.1.

<sup>413</sup> The question of the intended readership of apologetic literature is much debated. See chapter 1, section 1.2 for a discussion. It seems to me that the *Contra Celsum* was written partly to re-assure fellow Christians (see preface 4) and partly to convert the pagans. Chadwick (1953), p.ix suggests that it was the fruit of actual debates which took place in Alexandria.

<sup>414</sup> On the origins of the latter as an aid to catholic missionaries in their attempts to convert the Moslems, see Davies (1992), p.6.



The aims and methods of the *Contra Celsum* are very apparent in Origen's discussions of the Agony in the Garden. Celsus and his fellows would have had little interest in the complexities of Atonement theory and Origen is well aware that they would be out of place here. The pagans would have been much more impressed by the depiction of Christ as the philosophical hero, following in the illustrious footsteps of Socrates and Epictetus and accepting with Stoic calm whatever blows might befall him. Throughout the *Contra Celsum*, Christ is presented as the mighty hero who can match and beat any of the pagan opposition. He is more Stoic than Epictetus, more miraculous than Asklepius and more vengeful than Dionysus.

(B) Christ's Prayers for the cup to pass from him and his final acceptance of the Passion.

13.1.

As has been said, the Christ of the *Contra Celsum* is deliberately cast in the guise of the Stoic sage, enduring with proverbial calm the blows of external fortune. Origen has little concern in this work for Christ's thrice repeated prayer for the cup to pass. When Celsus draws attention to this embarrassing episode, Origen chides him for quoting only the first half of the prayer and ignoring the second. The most important point is that Christ, in the end, accepts the cup (*Contra Celsum* 2.25). His preliminary refusal is simply a manifestation or expression of a genuine humanity. Christ was a real man and, as such, experienced that weakness of flesh which is characteristic of all humanity. Origen is keen to point out that the words *Let this cup pass from me* are spoken only once, whereas the phrase *Not as I will but as thou wilt* is repeated three times. Christ's 'willing spirit' is much stronger than his 'weak flesh' (*Contra Celsum* 2.25).

Origen also suggests that the prayer for the cup to pass could be interpreted as an expression of the 'purest philanthropy' (Crombie's translation). Christ knows that if he drinks the cup, suffers the Passion, the Jews will be lost and Jerusalem will be destroyed (*Contra Celsum* 2.25). It is the desire to avoid these wretched consequences that inspires the thrice repeated prayer.<sup>415</sup>

Once again, Origen will not countenance the thought that Christ's words are an expression of fear. The Agony is either proof of the Saviour's genuine (non-docetic) humanity or proof of a far-reaching divine beneficence. But what is lacking in the *Contra Celsum* is a satisfactory, *Christian*, explanation of Christ's final acceptance of the cup. We have seen how Origen explains Christ's acquiescence solely in terms of Stoic endurance. He agrees to the Passion, not because he understands his rôle as

Redeemer of the world, but because he is brave, magnanimous and well prepared. Madigan's problem number (2), that Christ is unaware of the salvific importance of his death, remains unsolved.

13.2.

A very different picture emerges when we look at those works written for a specifically Christian audience. In the *Exhortation to Martyrdom* and the *Commentary Series on St Matthew*, Origen's exegesis of the Agony in the Garden hinges precisely upon Christ's understanding of the salvific importance of his death. It is within this context that Origen explains both the initial refusal and the final acceptance of the cup of the Passion. This Christ is not the Christ of the Gospels, nor is he the Christ of the philosophers. This is the Christ of the theologians. All his thoughts, words and deeds are carefully (re-)interpreted to avoid the Christological problems inherent in the Gospel narrative.<sup>416</sup>

We have already seen how in the *Commentary Series on St. Matthew* Origen is extremely unwilling to admit that Christ in the Garden experienced psychological suffering. At most, he felt the 'beginnings' of fear and worry. Moreover, these 'beginnings' could be justified as a didactic charade performed for the benefit of the disciples. Origen does not believe that Christ was genuinely afraid at the prospect of death. Similarly, in chapter 29 of the *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Origen explicitly denies that Christ felt any fear (οὐδένα φοβούμενου . . . μηδενὸς δειλιῶντος). It obviously fits the protreptic purpose of the treatise to show Christ approaching death calmly and bravely. The would-be martyrs are thereby encouraged to have the same attitude.

Having stripped Christ of fear and worry, Origen has still to deal with the famous prayer – *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt* (Matthew 26.39). Origen's exegesis of this verse is once again meticulous: it hinges upon one small word, the demonstrative pronoun 'this' (τοῦτο). Origen argues that when Christ prays for *this* cup to pass from him, he is not praying to be spared the pain of martyrdom in general. If this were the case, he would not have used the demonstrative. Origen believes that Christ is praying to be spared *this particular kind* of martyrdom (*this particular* cup) and to suffer instead a death even more severe. Christ is asking the Father to be allowed to suffer the kind of death that would be of the most benefit to the most people, knowing full well that this would involve far greater suffering:

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<sup>415</sup> See also *Commentary Series on St Matthew* 92 for the same exegesis. We discuss this passage in section 14.2.

<sup>416</sup> Madigan (1995), pp.158-61.

ὄρα τοίνυν εἰ δύνασαι, παντὸς μαρτυρίου τοῦ καθ' ὁποιανοῦν πρόφασιν ἐξόδου ἀποτελουμένου ποτηρίου καλουμένου, φάσκειν ὅτι οὐ τὸ γένος τοῦ μαρτυρίου παρητεῖτο ὁ λέγων· "παρελθέτω ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο" (ἔφασκε γὰρ ἄν· παρελθέτω ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον) ἀλλὰ τάχα τὸ εἶδος τόδε. καὶ πρόσχες εἰ δυνατόν ἐνορῶντα τὸν σωτήρα τοῖς εἶδεσιν, ἵν' οὕτως ὀνομάσω, τῶν ποτηρίων καὶ τοῖς δι' ἕκαστον γενομένοις ἄν, καὶ καταλαμβάνοντα μετὰ τινος βαθυτάτης σοφίας τὰς διαφορὰς τόδε τὸ εἶδος τῆς ἐξόδου παραιτεῖσθαι τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἄλλο δὲ τάχα βαρύτερον αἰτεῖν λεληθότως, ἵνα καθολικώτερόν τι καὶ ἐπὶ πλείους φθάνον εὐεργέτημα ἀνυσθῇ δι' ἑτέρου ποτηρίου·

Christ is depicted here as the great Redeemer of the world and as consciously aware of the fact. He is not a suffering and agonized man, but the great beneficent God, calmly weighing up the relative advantages of different kinds of death. As Madigan points out,<sup>417</sup> one of the major difficulties with the Gethsemane episode is that it seems to present Christ as entirely ignorant of his salvific rôle: why would he ask for the cup to pass from him, if he knew that it was only by his death that mankind could be redeemed? In the *Exhortation*, Origen solves this problem by suggesting a radical new interpretation of Christ's prayer. This Christ is fully and consciously aware of the reasons for his death and is not seeking to avoid it. He is in full possession of divine foreknowledge, even middle knowledge: he knows that if he were to suffer X, Y would be the result, but that if he were to suffer P, Q would be the result, etc.

14.1.

In the *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Origen stresses that Christ welcomed the Passion and that the prayer for the cup to pass must not be taken at face value. Similar tendencies are apparent in the *Commentary Series on St. Matthew*, although here Origen does allow Christ at least some human reluctance to suffer the Crucifixion.

In the *Commentary*, Origen offers two possible interpretations of Christ's first prayer in Gethsemane. His first move is to see the prayer as simply a manifestation of Christ's genuine humanity and to exploit the didactic advantages of the episode. Origen's readers are urged to follow the example of Christ and agree, even against their own will, to follow the will of God: *docens ut non oremus nostram fieri voluntatem quando factum fuerit ut aliquid quam Deus* (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 92). By constantly deferring to the superior will of God, we shall avoid both over-confidence and despair: *nam sicut multum confidere non debemus, ne nostram virtutem videamur profiteri, sic multum*

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<sup>417</sup> Madigan (1995), p.159.

*pusillanimiter agere, et diffidere non debemus, ne Dei adiutoris nostri impotentiam videamur pronuntiare* (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 92).

According to this first interpretation, Christ's prayer would appear to comprise two distinct stages:

(1) The preliminary wish not to drink the cup.

(2) Agreeing to act against this wish (*acquiescere contra voluntatem suam*).

Origen's Christ is experiencing a literal 'agony', the struggle between two conflicting desires. On the one hand he wants to avoid physical pain, but on the other hand he wants to obey the will of the Father. Origen presents the Agony in the Garden as a conflict between the will of Christ and the will of the Father. Although Christ finally agrees to drink the cup, this is not because he actively wishes to do so. Indeed, Origen explicitly tells us that Christ *agreed against his own will* (*acquiescere contra voluntatem suam*). It is rather that, as a dutiful Son or good Christian, he obeys God. In this interpretation, there is no reference to Christ's understanding of the salvific importance of the Passion. Origen's main concern here is with the didactic value of the episode. As Christ followed the will of his Father, however horrific the consequences, so must we.

But there are surely some rather worrying theological problems involved in the suggestion that Christ could ever want anything so very different from his Father. Such a suggestion contradicts Origen's usual Christology. In the *de Principiis*, Origen tells us that the Saviour's soul has become God in all its acts and feelings and thoughts,<sup>418</sup> and that the man Jesus follows the will of the Logos like a shadow.<sup>419</sup> At *de Principiis* 4.4.4, we read that Christ's soul was the only soul that was able to carry out, unswervingly, all the wishes and plans of the Logos.<sup>420</sup> In Origen's New Testament exegesis, there is very little to suggest that Christ had a human will; his entire life on earth is directed and dictated by the will of God. The humanity of Christ has no active rôle to play, but is simply the passive instrument of the Logos.<sup>421</sup>

Perhaps, then, Christ's prayer for the cup to pass should be interpreted not as a genuine wish, but rather as an instinctive movement of the body whose proper nature is to shun pain and death. Christ's first

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<sup>418</sup> *omne quod agit, quod sensit, quod intelligit, deus est* (*de Principiis* 2.6.6).

<sup>419</sup> *pro eo enim quod sicut umbra corporis nostri inseparabilis est a corpore et indeclinabiliter motus ac gestus corporis suscipit et gerit, puto eum animae Christi opus ac motus, quae ei inseparabiliter inhaerebat et pro motu eius ac voluntate cuncta perpetrabat, ostendere volentem, umbram Christi domini hanc vocasse* (*de Principiis* 2.6.7).

<sup>420</sup> *suscepit . . . animam, nostrarum quidem animarum similem per naturam, proposito vero et virtute similem sibi, et talem, qualis omnes voluntates et dispensationes verbi et sapientiae indeclinabiliter posset implere.*

<sup>421</sup> See sections 9.1-9.3 for more on this.

prayer in Gethsemane could then be seen, not as a conflict between the Father and the Son, each wanting something different, but simply as the expression or proof of the full reality of the Incarnation. If we look carefully at the text, we find that this is exactly what Origen means. Christ's prayer for the cup to pass is the inevitable manifestation of his having assumed a real human body. It is Christ's corporeality – and that alone – that prompts him to make the prayer.<sup>422</sup> It is simply a natural and instinctive human reaction (*proprium est omnis hominis*). Indeed, the prayer is seized upon as the perfect Scriptural proof of the reality of the Incarnation, an unambiguous refutation of the folly of the docetics: *suscipiens enim naturam carnis humanae omnes proprietates implevit, ut non in phantasia habuisse, sed in veritate* (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 92).

In the Greek fragments of the *Commentary*, Origen explicitly argues that Christ repeated the prayer three times in order to prove that he was a real man: ἐκ τρίτου δὲ προσεύξατο βεβαιῶν ὅτι ἄνθρωπος γέγονεν . . . καὶ αὐτὸς ἅπαξ καὶ δις καὶ τρίτον τὸ αὐτὸ ἐφθέγγετο ὑπὲρ τοῦ πισώσασθαι τὴν οἰκονομίαν (*Commentary on St Matthew*, fragment 530 II). These comments would seem to imply that Christ was deliberately anticipating and refuting a future heresy. It was only because he foresaw the future heresy of docetism that Christ spoke these famous words. Ironically, however, this brief exegesis actually undermines the full reality of the Incarnation. Christ's prayer is no longer a genuine expression of a genuine humanity, but a lesson in doctrinal orthodoxy.

St Thomas Aquinas, in his discussion of the Agony in the Garden, provides an interesting overview of Patristic exegesis of this episode.<sup>423</sup> He cites Origen as interpreting the prayer as an expression of the 'natural will', a reflex reaction to the prospect of physical pain. The prayer is not a genuine (deliberative) wish to avoid the Passion, but an unavoidable human response. Aquinas goes on to interpret the prayer as an example of velleity, what Christ *would have wanted*, had the situation been different.<sup>424</sup>

<sup>422</sup> Throughout chapter 92 of the *Commentary Series on St Matthew*, Origen refers to the Saviour's human flesh as the cause or justification for the first prayer: *Deum veram humani corporis suscepisse naturam . . . qui poterat compati infirmitatibus nostris, quoniam et ipse circumdatus erat infirma natura humani corporis . . . participans corpus et sanguinem . . . suscipiens enim naturam carnis humanae . . . quia homo carnalis est . . . proprium hominis erat, quantum ad infirmitatem pertinet carnis, velle evadere passionem.*

<sup>423</sup> *Summa Theologica* Book 3, question 21, 4 *contra*.

<sup>424</sup> See section 14.3 for a discussion of Origen's anticipation of the Scholastic doctrine of velleity.

The majority of the Church Fathers were content to see Christ's prayer as simply the inevitable manifestation of genuine corporeality.<sup>425</sup> It was not until the sixth century, during the Monothelite Controversy, that theologians began to offer detailed discussions of the Gethsemane episode based upon an understanding of Christ's psychology rather than his physiology.<sup>426</sup>

#### 14.2.

While Origen's first interpretation of the Gethsemane prayer can be found in almost every other Patristic writer, his second interpretation is (as far as I can tell) unique.<sup>427</sup> Origen's second interpretation is that Christ wishes the cup to pass from him, not because he is afraid to die, but because he has foreseen that if he drinks the cup (suffers the Passion) the Jewish race will be lost and Judas will be damned.<sup>428</sup> This interpretation is similar to that of the *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. Once again Origen presents Christ, even in the moment of Agony, as the all-knowing Son of God and the entirely beneficent Redeemer. It is not fear that prompts the first prayer, but a great love for the Jews as the Chosen People. And, once again, this Christ is in possession of a precise middle-knowledge. He knows that if he refuses the cup, the Jews will not be lost nor will Judas be damned, but if he drinks the cup, the Gentiles will be saved. Having considered the relative advantages of both, he decides to drink:

*altera autem interpretatio loci huius est talis. quoniam quasi Filius charitatis Dei, secundum praescientiam quidem diligebat eos ex gentibus fuerant credituri; Iudaeos autem, quasi semen patrum sanctorum, quorum adoptio et gloria et testamenta et repromissiones, diligebat quasi ramos bonae oliviae. diligens autem eos videbat qualia erant passuri petentes eum ad mortem, et Barabbam eligentes ad vitam. ideo dicebat dolens de eis – 'Pater si possibile est, transeat calix iste a me.' rursus revocans desiderium suum, et videns quanta utilitas mundi totius esset futura per passionem ipsius, dicebat – 'sed non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.' videbat adhuc propter illum calicem passionis, etiam Iudam qui ex duodecim unus erat, filium fore perditionis. rursus intelligebat per illum calicem passionis, principatus et potestates triumphandas in corpore suo. propter ergo hos quos in passione sua nolebat perire, dicebat – 'Pater, si possibile est, transeat calix ipse a me.' propter salutem autem totius humani generis, quae per mortem eius Deo fuerant acquirenda, dicebat quasi recogitans – 'sed non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu' (Commentary Series on St Matthew 92).*

<sup>425</sup> So Lethel (1982), p.208: "Même si le mot volonté est employé, il s'agit plutôt d'un mouvement naturel de la chair qui craint le mort . . . il confirme la vérité de l'Incarnation."

<sup>426</sup> For a useful analysis of the Monothelite Controversy, see Louth (1996).

<sup>427</sup> Smith (1928), in his exhaustive over-view of Ante-Nicene Gospel exegesis, restricts it to Origen. Madigan (1985) does not mention it.

In this second interpretation of the Gethsemane prayer, the Agony has become completely internalized.

Christ has two conflicting desires, based upon two conflicting considerations:

-according to (*propter*) his great love for the Jews, he wants the cup to pass.

-according to (*propter*) his great love for future believers, he wants to drink it.

Verse 39B is thus interpreted metaphorically. It is not that Christ is submitting to the superior will of his Father, but that he is choosing between two conflicting desires of his own. It is emphatically stated that it is Christ's own wish that, through the Passion, the gentiles be redeemed. Moreover, this conflict (agony) is not between Christ's human nature and his divine nature: the two wishes are wishes of an omniscient God.

The Greek fragments of the *Commentary on St Matthew* give three further explanations of Christ's first prayer in Gethsemane: he does not want the disciples to be scattered, nor does he want St Peter to deny him, nor does he want the Temple to be destroyed (fragment 530 IIAB). As in Rufinus' Latin version, Christ finally chooses to drink the cup in order to save the Gentiles. The *Commentary Series on St Matthew* solves Madigan's problem number (2). Throughout the exegesis, Origen insists that Christ is fully aware of the Father's plans to redeem the world through the death of his Son (*videns quanta utilitas mundi totius esset futura per passionem ipsius*). This point is repeated in Origen's exegesis of Christ's second prayer (Matthew 26.42). It is precisely because he can foresee the future benefits of his death that the Saviour decides to drink the cup: *propter ergo bonum qui erat futurus post bibitum amaritudinem calicis, orat vice secunda dicens – 'Pater meus, si non est possibile ut transeat nisi bibero eum, fiat voluntas tua'* (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 92). It should be remembered that the Gospels themselves give no indication that Christ's final acquiescence to his Father's will had anything to do with his own understanding of the salvific importance of the Crucifixion. The Evangelists present it as the obedient, if rather grudging, submission to the will of God, whatever that will might be. Origen is not content with the bald Gospel narrative: he must add his own gloss.

14.3.

Since he obviously understands the reasons for the Passion, the Christ of the *Commentary Series on St Matthew* cannot be said to be in doubt (problem number 3) nor to submit to death involuntarily (problem number 5). Origen insists that Christ wanted to die.<sup>429</sup> This is most clearly seen in Origen's

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<sup>428</sup> The same interpretation is given at *Contra Celsum* 2.25, (see section 13.1).

<sup>429</sup> See sections 16.5-16.3 for a full discussion of Origen's doctrine of the voluntary nature of the Passion.

exegesis of Christ's second prayer (*Commentary Series on St. Matthew* 95). In this passage, Origen argues that the prayer – *let this cup pass from me* – is not a genuine wish, but a counter-factual conditional. Origen's interpretation is as follows:

- (1) Most of all, Christ wants to avoid the passion, but only if the justice of God would allow it (*hunc ergo calicem passionis principaliter quidem volebat a se transire . . . si tamen possibile esset quantum ad iustitiam Dei*).
- (2) If that is not possible, he wants to suffer the passion more than he wants to avoid it (*si tamen non poterat fieri, magis volebat ut biberet eum . . . quam ut faceret contra voluntatem paternam, bibitionem eius effugiens*).
- (3) It is not possible (implicit).
- (4) It is clear therefore that he wants to suffer the Passion (*manifestum est itaque quia bibere eum volebat*).

The protasis (*If it be possible . . .*) is false and Christ is well aware that it is false: the condition is contrary to known facts. Origen highlights this by replacing the indicative of the original with an imperfect subjunctive and adding the word *tamen* (*si tamen possibile esset*). Christ's prayer in Gethsemane is of the sort – If I were able to run the four-minute mile, I should want to represent my country at the Olympics. I am well aware, however, that the protasis is false and so, too, therefore is the apodosis. I cannot genuinely want to represent my country at the Olympics, because I am well aware that my athletic skills are far from sufficient. Similarly, Origen's Christ cannot genuinely want to avoid the Passion, because he is well aware that the justice of God could not allow it. So for Origen, Christ's prayer for the cup to pass is not a genuine wish, but a conditional or latent wish based upon a known counter-factual. This theory is very similar to the Mediaeval theory of velleity or conditional willing. We have already seen how Thomas Aquinas agrees with Origen that Christ's wish for the cup to pass was simply an expression of the 'natural will', an instinctive and unavoidable desire to avoid physical pain.<sup>430</sup> Aquinas goes on to say that had the situation been different – (had there been no particular reason to suffer the Passion) – this is what Christ *would have wanted*. This is the classic statement of the doctrine of velleity. Saarinen provides an interesting discussion of the doctrine as it developed in the Middle Ages.<sup>431</sup> His definition of the phenomenon corresponds exactly to Origen's analysis of Christ's second prayer: "x would will p, but he knows that, because of some other condition, he

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<sup>430</sup> See section 14.1.



actually wills not-p.”<sup>432</sup> Origen can thus conclude that Christ genuinely wanted to suffer the Passion: *manifestum est itaque quia bibere eum volebat* and *magis volebat ut bibere eum*. Despite the words of the Gospel – *Not as I will, but as thou wilt* – Origen’s Christ is not leaving it to God to decide whether or not it is good for him to drink the cup. Christ himself knows full well that it is only through his death upon the Cross that the Gentiles will be saved. He understands the *exitum bonum . . . qui erat futurus post bibitam amaritudinem calicis*.

#### 15.1.

Origen’s exegeses of the Agony in the Garden reveal that he was very much aware of the many Christological problems involved in the Gospel narrative. He tries very hard to remove any negative implications. First, Origen refutes the idea that Christ was overwhelmed by emotion. As an apologist, as a preacher and as a philosopher, Origen cannot accept that Christ was genuinely afraid or worried (Matthew 26.37). This verse must be interpreted in such a way as to allow Christ to conform to the philosophical ideal of ἀπάθεια. In the *Contra Celsum*, Christ takes on the traditional guise of the Stoic wise man, calmly accepting the blows of external fortune. It suits Origen’s apologetic task to present Christ as a rôle-model whom even the pagans could admire. A rather different Christ appears in the *Commentary on St Matthew* and the *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. Here, the emphasis is very much on the Saviour’s divine nature. Origen is keen to stress that Christ was fully aware of the soteriological significance of his death and that he wholeheartedly *wanted* to die. The thrice repeated prayer for the cup to pass takes on a radical new meaning. Origen cannot allow that Christ ever genuinely wished to avoid the Passion.

But although Origen might have succeeded in solving the Christological problems inherent in this episode, there was a price to pay. Origen has transformed the Christ of the Gospels into someone entirely different. Origen cannot allow Christ simply to be Christ. There is far too much at stake to settle for a straightforward reading of the Biblical text.

### CHRIST’S ARREST, CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH.

#### 16.1.

The Passion of Christ caused enormous problems for Christian apologists. The story of his arrest, trial, suffering and death show Christ at his most human. Naturally, the pagan opponents of Christianity

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<sup>431</sup> Saarinen (1994), pp. 69-71, 76-81 and 130-31.

seized upon this episode as the perfect proof that Christ was not God. They saw him as a weak man who was unable to defeat his opponents and who died a wretchedly ignoble death, deserted by almost all his followers and apparently even by God himself. As we have already noted, the behaviour of Christ during his last hours on earth was in stark contrast to the glorious behaviour of the popular pagan heroes, Dionysus and Apollonius. They found themselves in very similar situations to Christ, but behaved how gods *ought* to behave, defeating their enemies and escaping from prison.<sup>433</sup> In response to this, Origen felt it necessary to prove that, even during the Passion, Christ remained the omnipotent and glorious God. This was the safest way to refute the ridicule of the pagans. While later ages might be comforted by descriptions of the Passion that emphasized Christ's suffering humanity, this was not an option for the exegetes of the Early Church.<sup>434</sup>

At *Contra Celsum* 1.54, Celsus makes the explicit claim that Christ was not God because he was unable to avoid capture, imprisonment and death. This was a stock argument of the anti-Christian polemic and one which Origen would presumably have heard again and again from the philosophers of Alexandria. It is in direct response to this particular criticism that we are to understand much of Origen's exegesis of the Passion. The mistake of the pagans is the assumption that Christ wanted to avoid suffering. Against this, Origen emphasizes the Saviour's voluntary death. This is his major defence of the Passion narrative. Christ, as the omnipotent Son of God, was always able to escape from prison and wreak a terrible vengeance on his enemies. The fact that he suffered and died is proof that he *wanted* to suffer and die. At each stage of the Passion, Origen finds evidence of Christ's willingness to suffer, or proof rather of his actively wanting to suffer. It is not enough for Origen to claim that Christ was willing to die. This would be admirable, but no more admirable than the willingness of Socrates, Epictetus and the like. Origen must always emphasize the fact that Christ was God: without his consent, the evil intent of his enemies would have been to no avail.

In the last section of this chapter, we shall see how Origen's exegesis of the Son's last hours is an extended study of Christ's glorious, divine powers. Origen emphasizes the Saviour's divine nature by stressing that he died only because he *wanted* to die.

16.2.

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<sup>432</sup> Saarinen (1994), p.70.

<sup>433</sup> See section 4.2.

<sup>434</sup> See section 2.1.

Origen's Christ carefully engineers each stage of the Passion, from his arrest in Gethsemane to his death on the Cross. At *Commentary on St. John* 28.23 (18), Origen points out that it is Christ who chooses the exact moment for the Passion to begin. Only a week before, he had removed himself to Ephraim, because the time was not yet right (John 7.30).<sup>435</sup> In Gethsemane however the time has come and Christ willingly gives himself up. The crucial point in this exegesis is that if Christ had not wanted to be arrested, the soldiers would never have been able to do so: κατὰ τοῦτον δὲ τὸν τόπον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου δηλοῦται ὅτι εἰ μὲν ἐβούλετο μὴ ἀλῶναι, οὐκ ἂν κατεσχέθη.<sup>436</sup> This claim is repeated, at greater length, in the *Commentary Series on St. Matthew*. The healing of Malchus' ear and the instruction to St. Peter to put up his sword are proof that Christ wanted to be arrested: *nos docere omnes quoniam volens tradidit se ipsum* (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 100). In the same *Commentary*, Origen argues that Judas was well aware that Christ could not be arrested against his will. It is for this reason that he greets his Master by kissing him, in a vain attempt to conceal the real reason for his coming: *ideo hoc signum dedit, sciens iam quoniam si noluisset comprehendi, nusquam comprehensus fuisset, sed volens praebeuit se in manibus peccatorum* (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 100). At *Contra Celsum* 2.10, Origen even wonders whether Christ can really be said to have been arrested, since an arrest is something that happens against one's will: εἴπερ τὸ ἀλῶναι ἀκούσιόν ἐστιν, οὐχ ἐάλω ὁ Ἰησοῦς. Origen then repeats the claims of the *Commentary on St John* that Christ waited for precisely the right moment before he allowed the Passion to begin. The next stage, the Arraignment before Annas, Caiaphas and Pilate, provides Origen with further proof of Christ's voluntary death. Origen stresses the fact that the charges were entirely spurious and that Christ could easily have made a successful defence and been acquitted. His silence proves that he wanted to die: ὑπομένει ἐκὼν παθεῖν μεγαλοφυῶς ὑπερορῶν τοὺς κατηγοροὺς (*Commentary on St Matthew*, fragment 545).<sup>437</sup>

16.3.

This doctrine of the Saviour's voluntary death is further emphasized in Origen's description of the Crucifixion itself. It is not simply that Christ was willing to die. Origen makes the further claim that, in a unique and divine way, Christ was the cause of his own death. Origen is so little interested in the

<sup>435</sup> Origen goes on to say that even if Christ had stayed in Jerusalem, the Jews would not have been able to arrest him, because the time had not yet come.

<sup>436</sup> Origen then points out that if Christ had simply repeated "I am he", the soldiers would again have fallen to the ground and he could have walked free.

Saviour's human nature that he can ignore entirely the process of the Crucifixion. It was Christ who killed himself, not the Romans, not the Jews and not the Cross. At *Commentary on St. John* 19.16 (4), Origen considers Christ's words to the Pharisees - *where I am going you cannot come* - and their wondering that perhaps he means to kill himself (John 7.34ff). This famous exchange provides Origen with the opportunity for a lengthy excursus on the voluntary nature of the Passion and the unique manner of Christ's death. Origen explicitly claims that Christ killed himself, albeit in a divine (θειότερον) an extraordinary (ἐξαιρετόν) way; it is obviously not a suicide in the way that a man might kill himself with a dagger or a noose. Origen defines death, in the traditional philosophical way, as the separation of body and soul.<sup>438</sup> He then claims that it was Christ who separated his soul from his body and that it was he who decided the exact moment that this should happen.

The crux of the exegesis is that Christ had the unique, divine power to release at will his soul from his body. Only he was able to say: *no man taketh (my life) from me. I lay it down myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again* (John 10.18). This is Origen's favourite proof-text of the voluntary nature of Christ's death.<sup>439</sup> Ordinarily, of course, the souls of the dying are taken from them, summoned (ἀπαιτούντων) by their attendant angels.<sup>440</sup> Even Moses, the Patriarchs and the Apostles had their souls taken from them. Only Christ gives up his soul of his own accord.

Origen insists that it was not by violent means that Christ died, i.e. not as the result of the Crucifixion. He even seems to suggest that there was no cause of death. Christ died simply because he decided, at a particular and carefully chosen moment, to release his soul from his body: νοήσωμεν γάρ τινα ὅτε βούλεται καταλιπόντα τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἐξίόντα χωρὶς ὁδοῦ τῆς φερούσης ἐπὶ τὸν θάνατον, ἤτοι διὰ βιαίων ὁδῶν ἢ διὰ νόσων, καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ θέλῃ ἐπανιόντα, καὶ χρώμενον ὀργάνῳ τῷ σώματι, ὃ καταλέλοιπεν· τὸν γὰρ τοιοῦτον ἐροῦμεν μὴ ἀπαιτεῖσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν. καὶ πρέπον γε ἐπὶ τῆς Ἰησοῦ ψυχῆς οὕτω λέγειν τὸν θάνατον γεγονέναι (*Commentary on St John* 19.16 (4)).

Origen supports his argument by comparing Christ's manner of death with that of the two thieves. Since the Evangelists are adamant that Christ's legs were not broken, it is clear that he did not die as the result of the Crucifixion. Origen then makes the extremely important claim that Christ's death is in fact the supreme manifestation of kingly power and might: ἐνεργήσαντος μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ

<sup>437</sup> See section 12.4 for a further discussion of the Saviour's silence.

<sup>438</sup> c.f. Plato, *Phaedo* 64C.

<sup>439</sup> See *Contra Celsum* 2.16 and 3.32 for similar use of this verse.

<sup>440</sup> Origen quotes the words of God in the parable of the rich fool: *This night your soul is required (ἀπαιτοῦσιν) of you* (Luke 20.17).

ἐξουσίας ἅπερ ἔκρινεν εὐλογον εἶναι ποιεῖν (*Commentary on St John* 19.16 (4)). This short sentence is an explicit and deliberate inversion of the traditional pagan response to the Crucifixion. Origen insists that Christ's death is in no way a passive response to external circumstance. Christ is the agent of his own death; he 'acts' (ἐνεργήσαντος) rather than suffers. Christ has made a particular judgement (ἔκρινεν) as to the proper (εὐλογον) course of action and acted upon it (ποιεῖν). He is in complete control of the entire situation. Origen concludes that the earthquake, the opening up of the tombs and the rending of the Temple veil are further proof of the miraculous nature of Christ's death.

In the *Contra Celsum*, a direct response to the mockery of the pagans, Origen further emphasizes the unique manner of Christ's death. It is explicitly described as 'the greatest miracle of all' (*Contra Celsum* 2.16); Origen repeats the idea that only Christ had the power to release his soul from his body and to take it up again at will: ἵνα ἐκοῦσα μὲν τὸ σῶμα καταλίπη ἡ ψυχὴ οἰκονομησαμένη δέ τινα ἔξω αὐτοῦ πάλιν ἐπανέλθῃ, ὅτε βούλεται; Once again, John 10.18 is quoted as the main Scriptural proof of the unique manner of Christ's voluntary death. Likewise, at *Contra Celsum* 3.32, Origen insists that it was not by natural necessity that Christ died, but rather by the exercise of miraculous powers: ἔλεγε δὴ ὁ ἑμὸς Ἰησοῦς περὶ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς, οὐ κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον χρεῶν χωριζομένης τοῦ σώματος ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν δοθεῖσαν αὐτῷ καὶ περὶ τούτου παράδοξον ἐξουσίαν, τό· "οὐδεὶς αἶρει τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τίθημι αὐτὴν ἀπ' ἑμαυτοῦ".<sup>441</sup> At *Contra Celsum* 2.69, Origen draws attention to the uniqueness of Christ's dead body. It is considered 'miraculous' that blood and water flowed from his pierced side. Ordinarily, this would be a sign of life: in corpses, the blood immediately congeals. It was this mystery, along with the earthquake, the rending of the Temple veil and the opening of the tombs, which led the centurion to recognize the divinity of Christ.

In the *Commentary Series on St. Matthew*, Origen tells us that it was a miracle that Christ died after only three hours, without his legs being broken or his side being pierced. This is seen as further proof of Christ's divine power, proof that it was he who chose exactly when to release his soul from his body: *qui potestatem habebat ponendi animam suam, posuit eam quando voluit ipse; quod prodigium stupuit centurio factum . . . miraculum enim erat quoniam post tres horas receptus est, qui forte biduum victurus erat in cruce secundum consuetudinem eorum qui suspenduntur quidem, non autem percutiuntur* (*Commentary Series on St Matthew* 140). Origen concludes that Pilate was amazed

<sup>441</sup> Along with John 10.18, Origen quotes John 2.19 (*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*), Matthew 27.50 (*Jesus cried again with a loud voice and gave up the ghost*) and Psalm 15.10 (*Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell*) in support of this argument.

(*miratus est*) that Christ could have died so quickly. This was obviously a new miracle (*novum miraculum*).

Finally, in the *Homilies on St Luke*, Origen highlights Christ's last words from the Cross – *Father, into thy hands do I commend my spirit* – as unambiguous Scriptural evidence that Christ did not die in the ordinary sense of the word. The verb παρατίθημι proves again the intentionality of Christ's death. Moreover, if his death was freely chosen (ἐκούσιον), Christ cannot properly be said to have 'died': τὸ δὲ "παρατίθημι" τὸ ἐκούσιον διδάσκει τοῦ πάθους καὶ δείκνυσιν, ὅτι οὐκ ἀπόλλυται (*in Luc. Hom. fragment 23.46*).

Origen cannot allow Christ's death to be seen as an ordinary human death, as the result of unbearable physical distress. To admit this would be to play straight into the mocking hands of his pagan opponents. Origen feels it incumbent upon himself, *qua* apologist, to present the death of Christ as the supreme manifestation of his divine power. Christ was not killed: he chose, calmly and carefully, the exact moment to separate his soul from his body. It seems to me, however, that by arguing that Christ's death was so very out of the ordinary, Origen is veering dangerously close to the heresy of docetism. In the passages that we have been discussing, Origen argues that it was Christ's decision to separate his soul from his body, and that alone, that was the cause of his death. In this, Origen would seem to be admitting that Christ has assumed such an extraordinary kind of body that nothing, not even a Crucifixion, can harm it. Origen never mentions the pain of the Crucifixion and will certainly not admit that it was this that killed Christ. In Origen's peculiar Christology, the Crucifixion seems to have become a rather pointless charade.

## CONCLUSION

The arguments and discussions of this final chapter have provided further important proof that Origen's theology is primarily an apologetic theology. The fundamentals of his Christology are developed as a direct and carefully considered response to his pagan opponents. The emphasis on the Saviour's glorious divinity and the silencing of his suffering humanity are surely intended to impress potential converts from the pagan intelligentsia.

We have seen how Origen's explanation of the Redemption entirely ignores the humanity of the Redeemer. The fact that God became man has no direct salvific relevance. Christ is most often presented as the leader of a philosophical sect, sent to deliver the message of salvation. The Incarnation is simply a necessary pedagogic condescension, the ways and means to deliver this message. Salvation entirely depends upon the individual's free response to this message: we are saved simply by *wanting* to be saved. The atoning sacrifice of the Cross has no place in Origen's soteriology. It is also important to remember that Origen refuses to recognize the hardships and handicaps of fallen humanity. Without adequate cognisance of the fall and its consequences, the need for a Redeemer is greatly reduced. Man can (almost) save himself. Such a theory accords well with contemporary pagan theories of the individual's quest for progressive enlightenment.

Origen's theory of the soul of Christ is the perfect illustration of the main thesis of this study. In response to the ubiquitous pagan objection that God would never pollute himself by assuming a human body, Origen supposes the existence of Christ's human soul to be the intermediary uniting these two fundamentally opposed entities. This theory is a master-piece of apologetic compromise: no philosopher could deny that a soul is equally suited to be united with God as to assume a human body. The Incarnation immediately becomes an entirely philosophically credible event. It was quickly apparent however that the existence of Christ's human soul was nothing more than a sop to the pagans. It has no further rôle to play and cannot be said even to exist. Origen's famous image of the iron thrust into the fire illustrates the transformation of Christ's human soul into God: it has become the Logos (*de Principiis* 2.6.5-7). Origen's exegesis of the life of Christ as described in the four Gospels is an elaboration and illustration of this basic fact: the humanity of Christ has ceased to exist; it is the Logos that directs and dictates the Saviour's human life.

In his discussions of the Temptation of Christ, Origen describes a confrontation between the impeccable God and the witless devil. Satan has failed to realize that his opponent is the Son of God and, as such, is unable to be tempted. Origen claims that the Temptation is an experience of Christ's human nature and that it can therefore provide struggling humans with a useful moral exemplum. In fact however Origen's exegesis of this episode revolves around the Saviour's divine nature; we are set an impossible example to follow.

Origen's commentary on the Agony in the Garden must likewise be set within the correct polemical context. We saw how Origen's insistence that Christ felt only the *beginnings* of fear (προπάθεια) was a deliberate attempt to cast the Saviour in the rôle of the Stoic sage, proverbially calm in the face of external mishap. The same tendency is apparent in Origen's exegesis of the Arraignment before Pilate, where Origen makes explicit use of Stoic terminology to describe Christ's complete and utter calm. In the context of constant pagan jibes, Origen must work hard to preserve the bravery and dignity of the Saviour. In particular, the thrice-repeated prayer for the cup pass must undergo a thorough re-interpretation. Origen cannot allow that Christ genuinely wished to avoid the Passion. The prayer is rather interpreted a counter-factual conditional, i.e. what Christ *would have wished* had the situation been different. Since Christ, *qua* the omniscient Redeemer, realized the immeasurable future benefits of the Passion, he wants to drink the cup.

The doctrine of the Saviour's voluntary death is a very important aspect of Origen's Christology. In response to pagan polemics comparing Christ unfavourably to Apollonius and Dionysus – who easily defeated their tormentors – Origen repeatedly insists that Christ died only because he wanted to die. His tormentors could have had no power over him, had he not explicitly allowed it. For example, at his arrest in Gethsemane Christ took the conscious decision to 'put to sleep' (*soporare*) his divinity. We also saw how Origen refuses to mention the pain and suffering involved in the Crucifixion. This would only have increased the pagans' scorn. Instead, Origen describes a brief and painless event, culminating in the calm decision to release the soul from the body.

We can conclude therefore that Origen's entire Christology was developed in response to certain specific opponents, either within the Church or without. In chapters 1 and 2, we saw how Origen's doctrine of the three divine substances was conceived as a reply to the extreme unitarianism of the Monarchian modalists. We also saw how Origen's descriptions of the Logos as the intermediary between God and man must be placed within the context of the pagan philosophical insistence on the



transcendence of the first God. In this last chapter, we have seen how (1) Origen's soteriology, (2) his explanation of the process of the Incarnation and (3) his exegesis of the Saviour's life and death have an overtly evangelistic aim. Each point is carefully developed to convince and – ultimately – to convert philosophically minded pagan opponents. With his exclusive focus on the Saviour's divine nature, Origen undermines the basic pagan objections to the Christian religion. It is hard to gauge the ultimate success of this mission, but we can cite at least one philosopher, Heraclas, who owed his faith to Origen's sensitive evangelism.

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